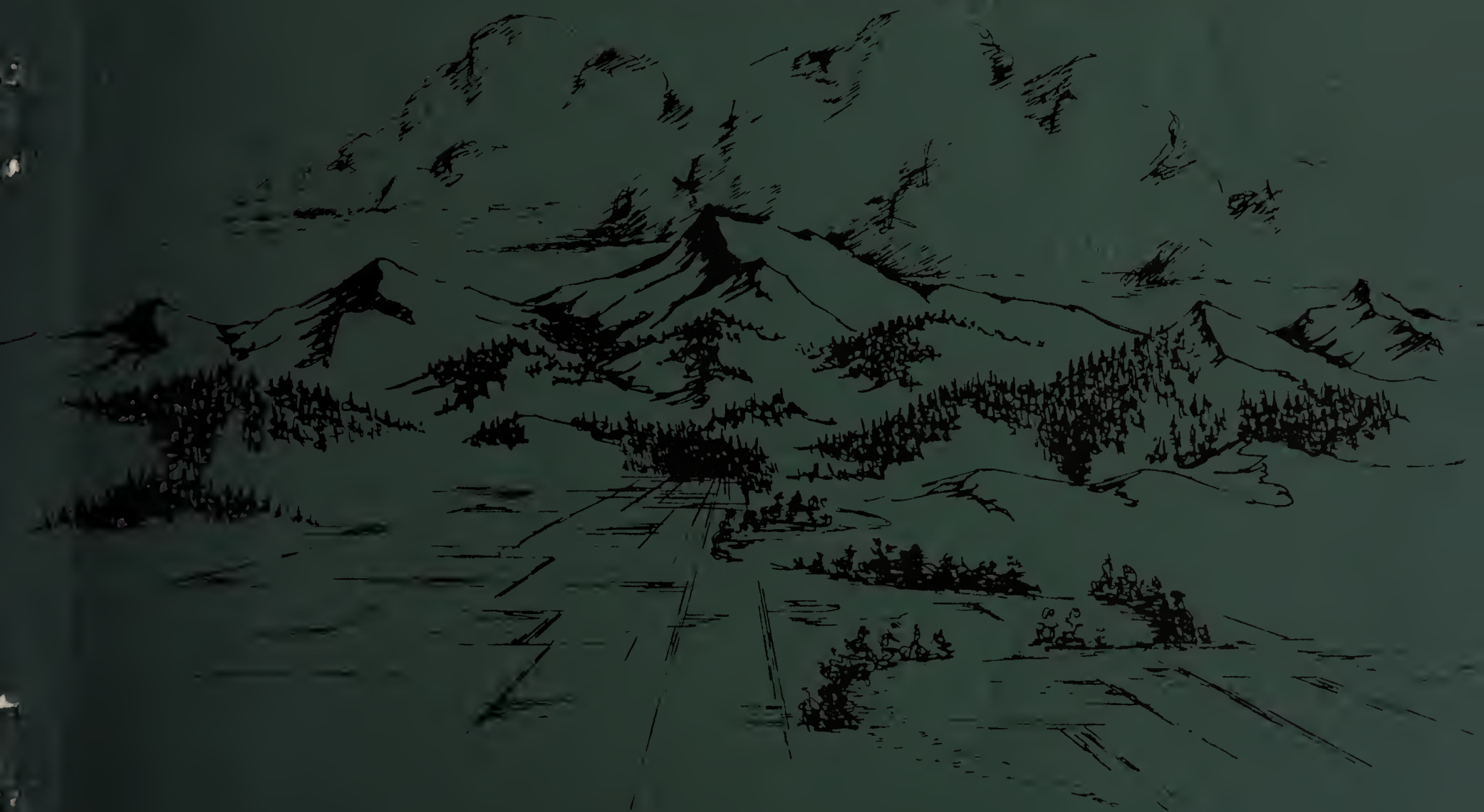


A General Historical Survey of the Pryor Mountains

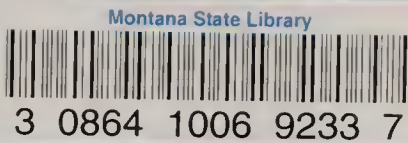
by David Harvey

Bureau of Land Management - Billings, Montana



Resources Development Internship Program
Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

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OCT 2 1994

A GENERAL HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE PRYOR MOUNTAINS

by

David W. Harvey

Sponsored by the Bureau of Land Management
Billings District Office
Billings, Montana

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September, 1974

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Abstract

The thrust of this report is a general historical survey of the human habitation of the Pryor Mountains and adjacent areas. Information was obtained from over thirty personal interviews, along with library research and photographic field work. Interviews were the basis from which much of the local color and attitudes of early settlers were obtained.

The report emphasized early historical settlement and folklore. Discussion of early settlements and historic sites centered around such communities as Upper Sage Creek, the Bowler Flats, Crooked Creek, Lovell and Cowley, and the Dryhead country.

A historical evaluation was done on the wild horses and the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range. It explains some of the attitudes of the public and government towards the wild horses and the events that led to the establishment of the horse range.

This general survey is by no means a complete history of the human historical habitation of the Pryors. But since so little has been written on the habitation of the Pryor Mountains, a general history was needed to set the groundwork for future historical investigations. This report is intended as a plea for further historical interpretation of the Pryors. History is very much "alive" in the Pryors, with the existence of many old cabins, early roads and trails, and wild horses. Not only should there be restoration and preservation of historic sites, but the environment surrounding these sites should be preserved in its natural state. The overall scenic quality of the Pryors is just as important as the individual sites.



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Introduction

When I was first offered the opportunity to write the history of the Pryor Mountains, I had some apprehension about the task. Not because of any presupposition of the enormity of the task, but because I had no inkling what the Pryors were, or anything about the history of Montana in general. I had to run to a map to see exactly where the Pryors were, much less to discover the vastness of Montana. Although a history student, I had little prior exposure to America's western heritage. You could say that this summer I have had a crash course on Montana-Wyoming history. It is funny that I now know more about the history of the people of the Pryor Mountain area than I do of the area where I grew up back East.

But being a newcomer to the West had its advantages. I did not have any preconceived notions or prejudices about the area I was about to historically dive into. I interviewed people with a hopefully open mind. I listened to what they had to say about their land. Interviewing some of the "old-timers" gave me the privilege, seldom found any more, of talking to people "who were the first to settle, or their parents were, in a particular region during the time of the open range and squatter's rights."¹ I hope I have illuminated the pioneering experiences, both negative and positive, that helped shape the destiny of the Pryors.

The thrust of this report is concerned with the human habitation of the Pryor Mountains since the late 19th century, with emphasis on early historical settlement and its folklore. I only scratch the surface of prehistoric and Indian habitation of the area. I intentionally avoided, for the most part, economic and physical aspects of the Pryor Mountains. These are separate projects in themselves. But this people-oriented report is by no means a complete history of the human historical habitation of the Pryors. It is only a beginning. The report has too many holes. The time I was allotted for this project was too short to allow me to follow up extensively on most leads. Possibly, I tried to cover too wide of an area. The positive aspect of doing a general survey is that since so little has been written on the Pryors, a general survey was needed to set the groundwork for future historical investigations. Anything written about the Pryors had to contribute something of value to the historiography of the area.

One problem I had in describing the location of sites in the Pryors was that some of the land is still unsurveyed. What legal locations I did find are listed in Appendix B. Another problem I encountered was the lack of information on the human historical habitation of lands under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management. Much of the human habitation and historical sites that I have covered are located on either Forest Service land, the Crow Indian Reservation, or on private land. It seems that our national resource lands have not been the most desirable places to live. The early settlers picked the choice land for habitation and agriculture, leaving the rest for the public domain, which is BLM land today. Most of the BLM land around the Pryors is arid and rocky. It has been mostly used for range or mining purposes.

Another research problem was the conflicting information I occasionally received from my interviews. I would get different versions of the same story, or on the location or significance of a historical site. So the authenticity of certain information may be questioned. Nevertheless, most of the questionable information has some value, because it is part of the folklore of the area.

I hope this report will somewhat explain the unique historicalness of the Pryor Mountains, where history is very much "alive," with existence of many old cabins, early roads and trails, and wild horses. I hope my historical evaluation of the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range will help explain some of the attitudes of the public and government towards the wild horses and the events that led to the establishment of the horse range.

I would like to thank all the people I interviewed for taking the time to help me obtain historical knowledge and understanding of the Pryors. I would like to thank everyone at the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), especially my supervisor Lowell "Bud" Brown and Keith Thurlkill, for all the assistance they gave me in putting together this project. I would also like to thank Henry Peterson and Scott Frazier, Forest Service Rangers in the Pryors, for letting me use the Forest Service "Green Shack" during some of my overnight stays in the Pryors. Lastly, I extend my appreciation to WICHE (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education) for providing me the internship which enabled me to engage in such a fascinating project.

I. Early History and General Description of the Pryors

"The Crow country is a good country. The Great Spirit has put it exactly in the right place... When the summer heats scorch the prairies, you can draw up under the mountains, where the air is sweet and cool, the grass fresh, and the bright streams come tumbling out of the snowbanks... In the autumn, when your horses are fat and strong from the mountain pastures, you can go into the plains and hunt the buffalo."²

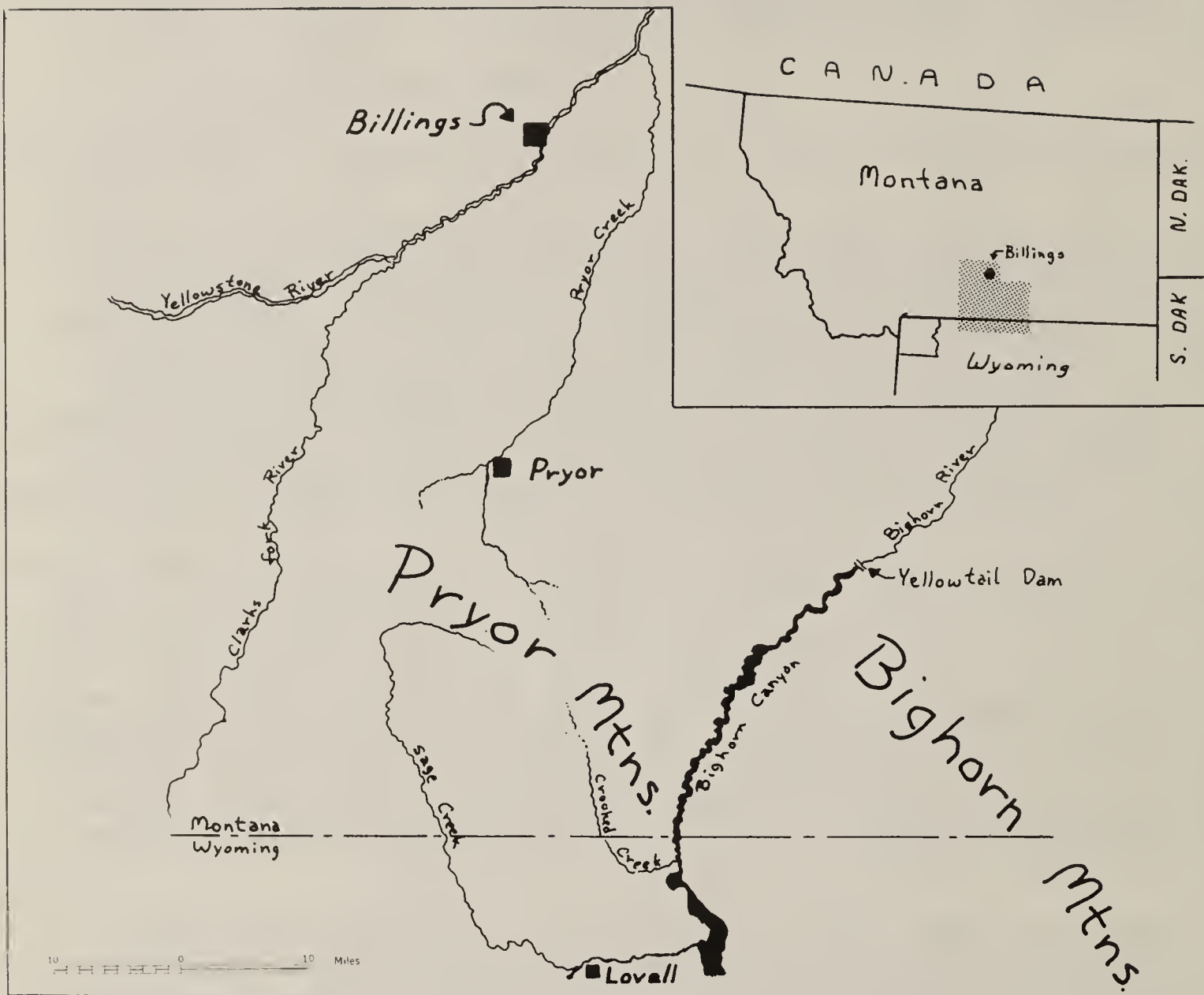
Arapooish, Crow Chief

The Pryor Mountains are located in southeastern Montana (see map, page 2), with a small portion of its foothills in Wyoming. They are west of the Big Horns, and east of the Clarks Fork Valley. The history of the Pryors does not stretch back very far, in written record terminology any how. In fact, the history of all of Montana is not very old. The historic period in Montana only begins with the Lewis and Clark expedition (1805-1806).³ This is not to say that other trappers and explorers had not previously penetrated the territory of what is known today as Montana. But it was not until Lewis and Clark that a definitive historical account was recorded about the Upper Missouri country and the mountains to the south. Of the mountains to the south, I am most concerned about the Pryors.

"Among traders who penetrated the country west of the Missouri River prior to the 19th century were the French Canadian Verendyre brothers."⁴ They were obsessively concerned with locating a waterway through the interior of the country to the Pacific Ocean, during the years of 1742-1743. Their exact route through the Yellowstone Valley, and the Big Horn Basin, has been opened to much speculation. One source has them leaving the Missouri River country and "turning south to the Yellowstone they passed through Pryor Gap to the Shoshone River and followed up the Big Horn as far as the Wind River Mountains."⁵ Any how, it was not until Lewis and Clark that a definitive guide for fur traders was possible.

The Pryors, and Pryor Creek, obtained their "civilized" names after Sergeant Nathaniel Pryor of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Pryor is most known for his misfortune while camping on Pryor Creek, north of the mountains. Crow Indians stole all of his horses during the night! Pryor was to have delivered the horses to Clark at a destination along the Yellowstone. They were to have been used for trade with the Mandan Indians. Sergeant Pryor and his company had to proceed by foot towards the Yellowstone, and then down the river in makeshift "skin" canoes, catching up with Clark somewhere on the Missouri.

The mountains that Pryor saw, and were to be named after, are "low and ancient mountains. They contain beautiful miniature canyons, limestone caves, outcroppings of the oldest rock in the world -- and a long, long record of human occupation."⁶ The visual contrasts of "white limestone palisades with dark conifers, of open grassy spaces with surrounding forests, of flat places with sudden steep overlooks, give the Pryors



Pryor Mountains Vicinity Map

a special feeling."⁷ I have often felt this feeling. The Pryors have a "soft" personality all their own. There is a stillness and serenity about them. They are not violent or restless. They are like a person who has come to terms with him or herself. They have found peace within.

The Crows looked upon the Pryors as a spiritual place. It was a place to be revered and respected. Crow Indian Henry Old Coyote spoke of the earth (the Pryors) as our "mother": "We come from it and we return to it. The earth is our commissary for food, fuel, shelter and tools."⁸

The Pryors are divided into five environmental zones. The alpine zone, from 8,000 to 8,800 feet, is mostly large open meadows with lower elevations sporting timber around the fringes of the meadows. Summer grazing of cattle and sheep takes place here. The limestone rockland zone, from 6,000 to 8,000 feet, is made up of steep-sided canyons dotted with thousands of caves. Its ridges are covered with fir, spruce and pine. The lower slopes of these mountainsides make up the sandstone cuesta (5,400-6,000 feet) zone. The grassland zone, from 4,600-5,400 feet, is made up mostly of open rolling prairie with some flat top hills, with a lot of sagebrush. The lowest zone, the dryland (3,500-4,600 feet), is about five to six miles from the slopes of the mountains, with large expanses of open country, devoid of much vegetation.⁹

The Pryors are a small oasis in a vast dryland. The area has been too dry to support agriculture and a large population. Yet, the Pryors are and have been more liveable than ranges like the Beartooth. Their gentle slopes remind one of the "soft" mountain ranges back East, like the Appalachians. Although devoid of the abundant vegetation of eastern ranges, the Pryors "rich environmental diversity has made for excellent living habitation for man for centuries."¹⁰

Lawrence L. Loendorf made an archaeological study of the Pryors in 1969, which indicated that many of the mountains' caves showed little indication of Indian habitation. "Lack of water was one main reason why many of the caves were not occupied by prehistoric peoples."¹¹ Joe Medicine Crow, Crow Indian archaeologist, claims his people never occupied the caves. When the Crows came to the area about 300 years ago, members of the lost "Sheepeater Tribe" were occupying some of the caves.¹²

Other evidence of Indian habitation of the Pryors is the existence of many "Tipi Rings" in the area. Tipi rings are stone circles that were supposedly used to hold down the skin of a conical shaped habitational structure. But some rings are too small or too large for that use. "Also, many rings lack other evidence of human habitation, such as artifacts, use of fire, floors, and great distances from wood and water. Therefore, some of the rings must have been used for ceremonial purposes."¹³

The Crows are of Siouan origin. They were once part of the Hidatsu tribe that was driven from the Great Lakes region by the Sioux and Chippewa tribes. About 1600, the Hidatsu located along the Missouri River, near where Mandan, North Dakota, is today. They split into two bands. One

went westward towards the Yellowstone and became known as the Crows. Originally, in Hidatsu tongue, the Crows were called "Absarokee." "Absa" meant large-beaked bird, and "Rokee" meant children. Sign language interpretation of "Absarokee" was represented by the flapping of the arms, like wings, like a raven or a "crow."¹⁴

The Pryors were considered more blessed than other mountain ranges. It was a place to fast and hopefully receive "visions." But the Pryors were more than just a sacred area. "The constant pressure of surrounding hostile Indian tribes made the Pryors an important refuge or retreat, as compared to the openness of the surrounding buffalo plains."¹⁵ Once the Crows were outnumbered 20 to 1 along Pryor Creek, but they drove off their enemies. They used Pryor Gap as a "trap" against their adversaries. Many a fight occurred there, with the last one occurring around 1870.

The Crow names for rivers, mountain ranges, creeks, and other geographical locations were drawn from the same sources as their personal names: supernatural experiences, actual events, and physical features. Present-day Pryor Gap was originally called "Hits-with-the-Arrows" Gap, named after the Indian practice of shooting arrows at "Arrow Rock." It was a sacrifice to the god-like "Little People" who supposedly lived in the rock. Hence, Pryor Creek is really Arrow Creek, and the Pryor Mountains are Arrowhead Mountains.¹⁶

There are two versions of how these supernatural "Little People" came about. The first is that they emerged from "Arrow Rock" to give advice to a fasting chief, who later became a highly respected medicine man. The second version has to do with a Crow Indian couple traveling through the Gap one day with their infant son. The baby was fastened to a dog travois, but he fell off and could not be found. Years later, when evil times had befallen the Crow tribe, a young man emerged from "Arrow Rock" and told the Crows where to find food. This young man was supposedly the "lost baby," who during those years had been cared for by the "Little People." Thereafter, offerings consisting of arrows and rock pilings have been left for the "Little People" at Arrow Rock. These sacrifices would insure safe passage through the Gap. Arrow Rock is located at the north end of Pryor Gap.

Nearby Arrow Rock is a cave named the "Home of the Little People." It is located a couple of miles south of Arrow Rock on the east side of Pryor Creek Canyon. "The cave is supposed to have supernatural powers for one who is able to withstand the little people's abuse before they give you the power."¹⁸

The "Little People" supposedly left when the railroad scared them away when they built the tunnel through the mountain near Arrow Rock. But some insist they have returned, and are alive and well in Pryor Gap.

These "mysteries of the environment have always been attractive rather than repellent to the Indians."¹⁹ Another Indian name for the Pryors, "the Land of the Eagle," probably originated because of the "Thunderbird"



Pryor Gap and "Section House" Draw - Castle Rock in Distance



Arrow Rock



East Pryor Mtn. from "Bad Pass

mystery. The nest of the "Thunderbird" is reportedly located above Sage Creek in the Pryors. Joe Medicine Crow claims that whenever Crows got near a certain heavily timbered hill thunder and lightning would occur. This seemed to indicate that "Thunderbird" nested there. One time a white man went there to cut timber and was struck and killed by lightning! This really convinced most Crows that "Thunderbird" lived there. Joe Medicine Crow says he would go up there, "but only in December when Thunderbird sleeps!"²⁰

During the period of fur trading and trapping, from the early to mid-1800's, good relations generally prevailed between the Crows and the trappers. One of the first trappers to explore the Big Horn Basin, via the Pryor Mountains, was John Colter. A member of the Lewis and Clark expedition, Colter gained release from the expedition on its return trip through Montana in 1807. Passing through Pryor Gap during the winter of 1807-1808, Colter explored the Big Horn Basin and eventually went on to discover the wonders of what is known today as Yellowstone National Park. Colter's main objective was to drum up fur trade for Manuel Lisa.

After Colter's exploration, the Pryor Gap provided a gateway for trappers on their way to the Big Horn Basin. Clashes inevitably occurred between the different fur companies. The independent or "free" trappers competed against the big fur company of the time, the American Fur Company. A group of these independents entered the Big Horn Basin from the south in the fall of 1848. "They spent the fall months trapping the various streams between Wind River and Pryor Creek. They spent the winter in a small basin in the Pryor Mountains, which allotted them security and defense from the Indians."²¹ They lived off the plentiful number of elk, deer, and buffalo in the Pryors. Trouble with the Blackfoot Indians occurred when seven of them were caught stealing the trappers' horses. Two were shot and scalped, while the rest escaped. The trappers did not want the Indians to get away for fear that their camp would be exposed. The Indians circled around the southwest Pryors and headed towards the Gap, but were caught on the way by the trappers. "That night the camp in the Pryors had seven scalps as trophies of the day's adventure."²²

The Indian and trapper explorations through the Gap gave way in later years to freight haulers. They hauled supplies between Billings and the Big Horn Basin via the Pryor Gap. The railroad at the turn of the century replaced the freight haulers as the principal means of moving cargo and supplies from the Yellowstone Valley to the Big Horn Basin.

Another route that connected the Yellowstone Valley and the Big Horn Basin was the "Bad Pass." It is located between the Pryors and the Big Horns, running along the west side of the Big Horn River. It was also known as the Sioux or Shoshone Trail. "This well-used route is now generally called "Bad Pass," rather than Sioux Trail, because it describes the trail's geography and its name does not imply use by only one group."²³ "Bad Pass" is an appropriate name for the trail because it runs through such a contorted and twisted terrain. Captain Bonneville described the pass as a "frightful and rugged route emphatically called the bad pass."²⁴

"Bad Pass" is marked in several places (especially the stretch between the Devil's Canyon and Barry's Landing) by rock pilings or cairns along the

trail. The cairns are subjects of varied interpretations. "Tuffy" Abbott of Bridger recalled that Plenty Coups, a good friend of his, told him that the rock pilings were placed along the road to mark the trail for other tribes coming along the canyon. Francis Burrell of Lovell claims that the rock pilings along the "Bad Pass" Trail are there because they were in the way! Indians picked up the rocks and threw them to the side. Otherwise, the roadbed would have been too rocky for their travois.

Explorers and trappers alike used the "Bad Pass" Trail. Larocque in 1805 traveled with the Crow and some Shoshone to the base of the Big Horns via the trail. The Crows also used the trail to get to the Mandan-Hidatsu villages. In 1810, William Price Hunt took the Astor party along this route to the Crows. With the establishment of fur posts at the mouth of the Big Horn, the "Bad Pass" was used by fur traders coming from their annual rendezvous in the Rockies.²⁵

One surveying crew in the Bighorn Canyon was led by one of the first men to walk through the canyon, Edward Gillette. He was a locating engineer for the Burlington Railroad. In March, 1891, Gillette and company headed down the snow and ice-filled canyon. They returned via the Sioux (Bad Pass) Trail: "The country was covered a foot or more with snow, the trail could be seen like a great white ribbon a mile distant winding its way through the hills. This old trail runs parallel to the canyon and some four or five miles to the west . . . skirting the base of the Pryor Mountains. From the size of the trail and the thousands of piles of rock which mark its course, this thoroughfare, connecting the Big Horn Basin with the Yellowstone Valley, must have been used for centuries by buffalo and Indians."²⁶

"Bad Pass" was "a prehistoric and historic Indian trail, a trade route for mountain men, a cattle trail, a mail route to the Dryhead, and now an access to a recreation area."²⁷ Two other significant trails that passed near the Pryor Mountain country were the Bozeman and Bridger Trails. Both were concerned in reaching the gold strikes in the mountains around Virginia City, in western Montana. Both trails opened up routes for trade and settlement in Montana. The first great wave of homesteaders into Montana came along these routes, with the Bozeman Trail being the most significant. Opened in the early 1860's by John Bozeman, one of the routes taken by the caravans along the Bozeman came through the Pryors "along the Beauvois Creek in the Dryhead country, but did not cross the creek at initial contact, but followed an old Indian trail called the 'Tepee Trail' along the northern foothills of the Pryor Mountains to the Clarks Fork River."²⁸ The Bozeman Trail crossed near the present town of Pryor, just north of the Pryor Gap. Pete Tuggle, owner of a ranch southeast of Pryor, showed me many wagon ruts on his land made by the caravans along the Bozeman. Pete said, "There was not any set trail. They crossed wherever the land was solid!"

The Bozeman Trail was abandoned by the United States government around 1868 because of military defeats inflicted upon the U. S. Army in their attempt to keep the road open against Red Cloud and his Sioux warriors. It was the U. S. Cavalry's "Vietnam."

Trapper and explorer Jim Bridger advocated a shorter, easier and safer route towards the western Montana gold fields. To avoid the Sioux nation, he reportedly went through the Big Horn Basin, and then northwest up through present-day Frannie and Warren; and then took the route between Bowler and Bridger, passing one mile south of the present town of Bridger. But this route has been challenged. Dick Colberg of Billings claims that possibly "the Bridger Trail, when west of Red Pryor Mountain, cut northeast through Pryor Gap and joined the Bozeman Trail and then proceeded west to present-day Edgar."²⁹ The 1868 surveyor general's map seems to confirm the possibility of an alternate Bridger Trail through the Gap.

The migratory rush towards the gold fields in western Montana had its effect on the Pryors and eastern Montana. Wagon trains and travelers to western Montana needed protection. Hence, the presence of the U. S. Army in eastern Montana. Protection (increased after Custer's defeat in 1876) from the Indians offered an inducement to some westward-bound settlers to go no further and to put down roots in the eastern part of the territory. Hence, the large Crow Reservation was pressured to release some of its land for white settlement. "Between 1891-1904, the Crows signed three important agreements with the United States. Two of these agreements reduced acreage of the reservation in return for which the Indians received money to underwrite needed (sic) capital improvements. The third agreement allowed the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad to build tracks across the Reservation."³⁰

One of these agreements, ratified in Congress on March 3, 1891, opened up most of the Pryor Mountains to homesteaders. Misunderstandings developed concerning the residual rights of individual Indians in the area ceded to the United States. Many white "claim jumpers" trespassed on land held by these Indians. On October 15, 1892, President Benjamin Harrison issued a proclamation declaring land ceded by the March 3, 1891, agreement, and not reserved to the Indians, was open to settlement. But since the area had not been surveyed, these "claim jumpers" swarmed in and took up Indian as well as government land. This naturally led to hot tempers and nervous guns, ending up with one Crow being shot to death! Harmony eventually came about when the area was partly surveyed and Indian allotments identified.³¹

With the opening of the "ceded strip," homesteads mushroomed in the Pryors, especially along Sage Creek, in the Bowler Flats, on Crooked Creek and in the Dryhead.

II. The Wild Horses

Today as the sun rays linger, and the bitter winters past:
There comes a man with papers, that claims my range and grass.
Although I have left the valleys, and left the lowlands green
And wandered to the badlands the worst I've ever seen,
Seems they're not content to leave me, In these bleak and dreary hills
I must go elsewhere they tell me, and not marr these wasted spills.
Yes must leave the range forever, give up the battle at last
They say the sheep and doagies are entitled to my grass.
I have fought my way thro winter weather, fair yes warm and even cold.
Never have I ask a helping, from those sturdy men so bold
Now that lies behind me and my summers just ahead.
Yes I've fought my way thro winters, froze and shivered in the cold.
I've given up the valleys in the quest of man's desire
Now they claim the badlands and the sloping hills that's higher.

Claim the hills that's in the Distance, All the valleys yes and plains
They have left me nothing stranger, In response to all my pains.
I have given up the shade trees and the brooks that run so clear.
Still they hunt me listen stranger, In response to all my pains
I am never free from fear.

My forage grounds are dreary wastes no sagebrush here to tire
Nothing but the western sun, to make my picking dryer.
Now they come with pick and sombro, over ridges hill and dale
Say they guess they'll have to put me in a labeled CAN TO SELL.

The Mustangs Reward - Written by Perrin L. Cummings - 1926

One of the challenges facing the early settlers in the Pryor Mountain area was the wild horse. Presently numbering around 120 (on the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range), wild horses by the thousands supposedly roamed the area before the arrival of the white man. Bess Tillett, an "old-timer" who owns a ranch on Crooked Creek, claims the wild horses were here when she first came to the area in 1894.

Columbus re-introduced the horse to North America (there had been a type of horse here earlier, but it became extinct or went over the Siberian bridge to Asia). But it was actually Cortez who brought the horse to the mainland, from the West Indies to Mexico in 1519. Many claim that today's wild horses are the descendants of Cortez's horses. Author Hope Ryden claims that, even though only a few hundred, pure-blooded descendants of the conquistadors' horses exist today, "Spanish" blood is still evident in all bands of wild horses in the west. Regardless of the massive interbreeding with domestics and runaways that has taken place, Spanish horse traits frequently emerge in wild horses that have as little as 1/32 of Spanish ancestry!¹

The spreading of the horse in America was the result of horses straying away from the conquistadors. The Indians also stole horses from the Spaniards. The Northern Plains Indians (including the Crows) initially obtained their horses, just prior to the historic period, in trade with the southern tribes, who had stolen them from the Spaniards.²

In the earlier days in the Pryors, there was little need for fences, since the natural barriers of canyons and steep cliffs contained the livestock where their owners put them. This "open range" policy prevailed in this area long after much of the west was already "fenced" in.³ But horses could surmount these natural barriers, causing many branded horses to join the wild horse bands that roamed freely throughout the Pryor Mountains. The depressed conditions during the twenties and thirties forced many owners to let their horses go and accounted for the explosion of the wild horse population during that period. These conditions also led to or augmented a way of thinking concerning the authenticity of the wild horses. I found it evident in the minds of many "old-timers" that I interviewed. They believed that all unbranded animals were "runaways" because of the conditions during the twenties and thirties. They felt all horses belong to someone. They just could not be "wild"! Some felt any animal would become "wild" if it is let loose for awhile. Some people were just prejudiced against wild horses. They contended that the horses competed with their cattle and sheep for grazing territory.

The question whether the Pryor Mountain wild horses are truly "wild," descendants of the Spanish horses, is a controversial one. Ron Hall, in his report on the wild horses for the Bureau of Land Management, states that William Hamilton, a trapper, roamed the Pryors in 1848, and none of his written observations included references to wild horses. Yet, a map of the spread of the horse in Wyman's "Wild Horse of the West" indicates that horses could have been in the Pryor Mountain area in the early 1700's.⁴

Hope Ryden speculates that possibly the horses that Sergeant Pryor "lost" in the Pryor Mountains back in 1807 could have augmented the wild horse herd! Therefore, there would be a connection with the conquistador past because the Lewis and Clark expedition obtained their horses from the Indians, who in turn had gotten them from the Spanish. Some also say that possibly the wild horse herd was augmented by the strays from the "Battle of the Little Big Horn." Many believers in the authenticity of the wild horses in the Pryors point to the recent scientific findings that show the vertebrae of some of the Pryor horses are exactly the same as the Spanish horse. Both lack the final vertebra in the spinal column.

Dr. Harold McCracken of Cody, Wyoming, an authority on wild horses, claims that the Crows had 4,000 horses as early as 1874, descendants of the Spanish breed. By 1900, there was an explosion in the horse population. There were 40,000 "Wild Indian Ponies" on the Crow Reservation alone, even though the Indian Agent had sold about 15,000 to the local canneries. Although the Crows had always cherished their horses, the \$3-\$10 a head they received from the sale was used by the tribe to purchase cattle.⁵

Hope Ryden claims that a number of ranchers in the past, like the Tilletts of Crooked Creek, have claimed unbranded or wild horses as their own to prevent horse runners from gathering up the herds.

So when the Bureau of Land Management initiated a campaign during the mid-sixties to rid the Pryors of the wild horse herd (numbering around 200 at the time), many residents in the Lovell and Crooked Creek area protested. A group led by the Rev. Floyd Schwieger, a Lovell minister, and Howard Lusch, Pacific Power and Light manager, sought to preserve the wild horses. The horses were considered an invaluable part of our western heritage. Also, the Lovell Chamber of Commerce saw the wild horses as a potential tourist gold mine, because of the establishment of the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area.

The BLM felt the horses were detrimental to the plant life in the area. They did not want the horses competing with livestock for available forage. But ranchers on the Wyoming side of the Pryors, especially the Tilletts, felt the BLM was wrong. They claimed there was plenty of forage for wildlife. The land was too high and water scarce for any other use but for wild horses. Cattle and sheep, for the most part, could not manage the rugged terrain to get to whatever grazing areas there were. Many of them felt, and rightly so, that after the BLM trapped and auctioned off the horses, the horses would most likely end up on the grocery store shelf as pet food. 'Many felt that the BLM was trying to 'improve' the land to impress 'higher-ups' in Washington."⁶

The Tilletts, self-appointed guardians of the wild horse herd, claimed all the horses that ran east of Crooked Creek. In March, 1966, the BLM accused the Tilletts of trespassing by violating their Taylor Grazing permit. The permit allowed for only 20 head, not 200! The BLM gave the Tilletts extra time to reduce the herd.

At the end of March, 1966, the BLM announced that they were recommending reduction of the wild horse herd to twenty, and the reintroduction of Big Horn sheep into the area. Many in the BLM felt that the horses were not wild because the Tilletts claimed ownership on domestic grounds. According to Harold Tysk, BLM State Director, referring to the Tilletts and their suspended horse and cattle permits: "If the Tilletts want to keep excess number of horses, could do so by decreasing the number of cattle they ran on their allotment -- either horses or cattle. A rancher using public lands cannot have the whole cake and eat it too."⁷

In April, 1966, the Tilletts claimed they would relinquish their ownership rights of the wild horse herd provided that the BLM establish a horse refuge, restore to them their grazing permits, and initiate a study of range conditions. With this compromise agreed upon, a one-year reprieve was ordered concerning the fate of the horses.

But by March, 1968, all "leave them alone" proposals concerning the wild horses had fallen upon deaf ears. The BLM proposed, before public hearings, three alternatives concerning the fate of the horses: 1) reduce the herd to 30 or 35, until the watershed recovers, but not to exceed 50 to 60; 2) reduce the herd to 10 to 15, but not to exceed 30; or 3) to corral all the horses, return all the branded ones to the rightful owners, sell the remainder, add more deer to the range, and reintroduce Big Horn sheep.⁸ The third proposal was finally agreed upon. There would be an auction of the horses during the summer of 1968.

These proposals by the BLM brought about more public protest. Hope Ryden did an ABC news special on the situation. She toured the horse range with Billings BLM District Manager, Dean Bibles. Mr. Bibles claimed that the removal of the horses was for humane reasons. The horses would starve in their present location, due to the overgrazed terrain. But according to Ms. Ryden, "The horses seemed to be thriving, not starving."

The BLM stated they did not have the adequate funding to assume responsibility for the welfare of the wild horses. They announced "unless some organization or group declared itself willing to sponsor and manage whatever wild horses might be retained in the Pryors, none would be spared."⁹ The Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Association, based in Lovell, claimed they would sponsor all 200 of the horses! They sought aid of the National Park Service in setting up a horse refuge within the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area. The Association claimed that the horses were not starving, had not overgrazed the terrain, and opposed the branding of the horses as being antithetical to their "wild" origin. They felt the BLM was acquiescing to the Montana Fish and Game, who wanted the range to be "improved" for the deer herd, making it more desirable for hunters.

The BLM was also accused of catering to the Montana Livestock Commission. On legal grounds, the BLM could defend its deference to the wishes of the Montana Livestock Commission, because unbranded stray horses were property of the state and so do not belong to the federal government. "Wild Horse" Annie (Mrs. Velma Johnston) well-known wild horse preservationist felt the BLM was pressured by special interest groups who believe that what is not commercially profitable to themselves in their use of public lands must go.¹⁰

The issue went before the U. S. District Court in Washington, D. C. Judge George Hart, impressed by the evidence that wild horses were not starving in the Pryors, instructed the Interior Department to delay any action concerning corralling and disposing of the wild horses. Secretary Udall was supposedly very displeased with the BLM for their outward appearance of disdain for wild horse preservationists. On September 9, 1968, Secretary Udall designated the 32,000-acre Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range. It is situated in the southeast corner of the Pryors, with the National Forest to its northwest, the Big Horn River to its east, and the Crooked Creek Canyon to its west.

Ultimately, Congress gave Udall's order legal sanction by the passage of Public Law 92-195 (December 15, 1971). The BLM and the U. S. Forest Service both were given the responsibility for the welfare of the wild horses.

A special Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Advisory Committee was set up, made up of representatives of private and governmental special interest groups, to hold meetings and make recommendations for the management of the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range.

Since that time, most of the controversies alluding to the wild horses have involved horse populations and control issues. The BLM claimed that reduction was necessary to prevent starvation. Opponents of reduction claimed that none would starve, if they were just left alone. Another controversy, what to do with the excess horses once reductions were carried out, became another thorn in the side of the BLM. Some advocated "humane killing," but ultimately the proponents of placing excess horses in private ownership won out.

The establishment of a wild horse range was a victory for the preservation of an unique aspect of our western heritage. Besides being a victory for "living history" and the preservation of the horse itself, it is nice to see things preserved that do not necessarily produce material wealth, or "useful" in a buying or selling sense, like cattle or sheep. But if the horses had been on land that was more commercially profitable, I feel their existence would have been terminated a long time ago.

III. Further Observations on the Wild Horses

Governmental agencies have never had much sympathy for the wild horse. The impression that I have received of governmental harassment of the horses has probably been augmented by the anti-government attitudes of some "old-timers" that I interviewed. Their negative impressions of government probably stem from their frontier heritage of "rugged individualism." I imagine the "invasion" of the Forest Service and the BLM into the Pryors did not settle too well with some of the original homesteaders. Government was looked upon as an "outsider" making in-roads into the homesteaders' domain. Bessie Tillett probably best expresses anti-government feeling when she told me: "The BLM all along has wanted to get rid of the horses, now they have claimed to save them!"

Bill Poole, owner of the old Stevens (originally Spencer) homestead on Upper Sage Creek, who at one time rounded up horses himself, recalled that the Forest Service used to round up wild horses. All the horses ended up in pet food canneries. Charles Williamson, one-time Forest Service Ranger in the Pryors, claimed the Forest Service began in 1923 to get rid of horses in the Pryors. Williamson said that "thousands of homesteaders' horses had been turned loose and became wild, and it was no more than right that they should go, but this little band was not of this class. They were, and are, the genuine little Spanish horses and there are about 70 head. They did not take away forage from the deer, since deer and horses seldom eat the same kind of plants. Still, the government wanted to get rid of these wild horses. Therefore, I resigned from the Service in 1929 and have never been sorry for it."¹

The late Edna Strong Anderson of Crooked Creek, sister of Bessie Strong Tillett, had numerous quarrels with the Tilletts over the ownership of the wild horses. Edna believed the present herd was related to the twenty head "Ma" Strong brought into Crooked Creek in the early 1900's. Supposedly included in those horses were three mares that belonged to Edna. The horses were given to the Strongs by the Shoshone Indians south of Lovell during the winter of 1898-1899.

I imagine horses were not the only thing the Andersons and the Tilletts argued about. Consensus around seems to indicate that there never was much love lost between Bessie and Edna. One time Edna's husband, Frank Anderson, was charged with second degree assault against Bessie's husband, Bill Tillett. It is alleged that Frank flourished a rifle and threatened the life of Bill Tillett!

The Tilletts, Edna Anderson, and the State of Montana were not the only ones to claim ownership of the wild horses. In 1966, when the fate and ownership of the horses was being heatedly discussed, Wallace Bent of Billings claimed they were his horses! He said he left about 25 head of horses on his Pryor Mountain ranch (on the Bowler Flats) when he moved out about 40 years ago. He was willing to let the Tilletts have them.

As I have mentioned, many "old-timers" did not think much of the wild horses. They were just worthless runaways, derived from the early settlers, or Indian herds. One "old-timer," Myron Lynde of Lodge Grass, used to

assist his father in rounding up horses around 1913-1915, "when there were thousands of them around." They used to corral them into horse traps made up of old railroad ties and telegraph wires, taken from the defunct Toluca-Cody railroad line. Myron feels the wild horses were not worth very much: "You couldn't give them away." He said most of them originated from old cavalry and Indian herds. Many were "dopey" due to inbreeding and from eating "loco" weed. If he had his way, he would just eliminate them altogether! He feels the present range conditions are cruel. Many horses starve, and many colts are malformed due to the inbreeding. The only good function these horses serve is to break the ice for cattle, enabling the cattle to get to water.

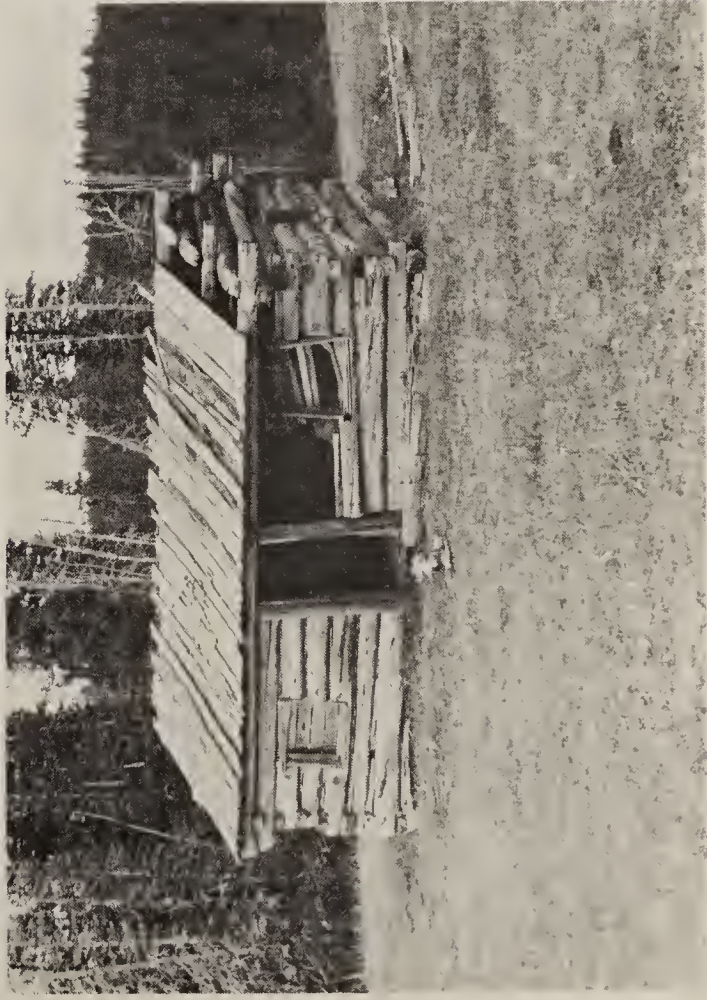
During the thirties and forties, Heman Smith of Lovell used to round up horses on the south slopes of the Pryors and corral them at Frannie, Wyoming. They used to "break" many of them at Frannie and sold the rest to canneries. Smith also assisted in building corrals and horse traps on the "Gyp Flats," the flat, desolate dryland south of the Pryors, near the Montana-Wyoming border. Smith claims one permanent corral was left near "Wheeler Scraper Pond."

Other remains of horse traps exist in the Pryors. A couple of old traps are evident up along the Tillett Ridge Road on the west ridge of the horse range, on Forest Service land. But when I went to inspect one of them in late August (1974), I found that it had been struck by lightning and had burned up. The BLM is planning to rebuild it. The remains of the other trap are scant. It is located a mile further down from the other one on Tillett Ridge, on the west side of the road. A number of sources have speculated that possibly Bud Phelps built these traps during the late 1920's, since he used to corral horses up there at the time. Another horse trap is located on the Mystery Cave Road on the east ridge of the horse range, south of Mystery Cave. It was built by Clarence Cummings and Jay Kelsey, during the late 1920's. Pat Marchant, a rancher on Crooked Creek in Wyoming, told me Jay Kelsey was her father and Clarence Cummings her uncle. Another uncle of hers, Perrin Cummings, built the cabin that sits back a little from the Mystery Cave Road on top of East Pryor. Pat Marchant's aunt, Myrtle Bailey, sister of Perrin, recalled that Perrin built that cabin during the early twenties. Being a lover of horses, as evident in his poem at the beginning of Chapter II, I guess he built the cabin up there to be close to the wild horses. He stayed up there during the winter of 1924-1925 in order to obtain the "right" to it. Like other homesteaders, he had to "improve" on the land, live so many months a year on the property, in order to obtain legal title to it. The young author and poet tragically died at the age of 27 (in 1927). "While working with unbroken horses at his father's ranch near Shriver on Upper Sage Creek, he was instantly killed when struck by a corral bar that several plunging horses tore from a fence."²

In the "draw" or coulee below the Cummings cabin, at the head of Hough Creek, are two old cabins owned by Herman Kreuger, of Cody, Wyoming. Kreuger built one of the cabins in the early 1930's. The other cabin was built earlier by the Fenners.



Wild Horses



Perrin Cummings Cabin



Horse Trap on Mystery Cave Road



Horse Trap on Tillett Ridge

The Marchants of Crooked Creek are not sympathetic to the circumstances that led to the establishment of the wild horse range. They recognize the sincerity of people like "Wild Horse" Annie (Mrs. Velma Johnston) and the Reverend Floyd Schwieger in their concern over the fate of the horses. But the Marchants are not happy over the fact that others on Crooked Creek used this cause as a vehicle to settle personal conflicts with governmental agencies. They felt no one had the right to be self-appointed guardians of the wild horses, since everyone on Crooked Creek, with no exceptions, had been involved at one time or another in rounding up wild horses. Roger Marchant, who rounded up horses ("more sport than profit") during the early fifties, said, "Everybody kept the good ones and sent the rest to the cannery. The only reason the rest of the wild horses did not get branded was because no one could catch them!"

The Bischoff brothers, Golden and Hiram (of Lovell), used to round up horses during the twenties. They got only \$4 a head for them! Golden remembers herds as large as 400, "which roamed the mountains east of the Big Horn River across from the Tillett range where horses now run. It cost us more to catch them than we got for them."³ Both brothers view the horses as genuinely wild. Hiram, whom I interviewed, feels these horses are a different breed. "The runaways that joined the herd died. They were not tough enough." Golden felt that "reduction of the horse herds in the early days was necessary to leave open range for cattle to graze."⁴ But Golden disagreed with the BLM's reduction policy during the sixties, claiming that the land on the Tillett spread was too rough for cattle grazing.

Jim Donley of Cowley used to round up horses during the late forties and early fifties on Big Pryor and the Gyp Flats. Some were used for the annual Cowley rodeo and then returned to their natural habitat. Others, of course, were sent to the cannery. Jim claimed that a lot of horses used to be on the Bowler Flats but many of them died from eating loco weed. He feels the wild horses are a "different breed." They are not runaways or the result of the horse boom during the Depression.

Although many people seem to disagree on the "worth" of the wild horses, they all seem to agree that some unbranded horses were around when the first white settlers arrived. Therefore, even if the wild horses were derived from Indian herds, the Indians must have obtained them from somewhere at sometime.

IV. Early Settlements - Upper Sage Creek and the Northern Pryors

Circumvention of the law in the form of cattle and horse rustling, conflicts between sheep and cattlemen, and harassment of the Indians, existed during the early settlement days along Upper Sage Creek.

During the late 1880's, a notorious horse thief and outlaw, "Teton" Jackson, hid out in a cave above Sage Creek, known today as the "Teton Jack" Cave. The cave is located about 2½ miles west of the Sage Creek Ranger Station on the north side of Sage Creek and the road. "Teton" was reported to have stolen hundreds of horses and killed an unknown number of men, including several Deputy U. S. Marshalls in Idaho and Utah. Frank Canton, a U. S. Marshall in Buffalo, Wyoming, who once arrested "Teton," called him "a most dangerous and vicious character." Bert Schwend, of Upper Sage Creek, thought that "Teton" once held up in the cave for a month. "In May, 1888, Teton was arrested nearby while driving a band of fifty horses across the Crow Reservation."¹

Grazing of cattle on the Pryors became quite extensive after the "ceded strip" was opened to settlement in 1892. Soon thereafter, "persons from considerable distance began to drive their stock into the area. They not only crowded the local residents, but in some cases took their grazing lands away from them."² Incensed natives got together to form vigilante groups to keep out these intruders. The vigilantes were successful in their pursuit, but left themselves criminally liable for some acts that took place. All this changed in 1907 when the U. S. Forest Service came into the Pryors. They gave local residents protection, reducing the temptation for some to take the law into their own hands.

Just inside the national forest boundary, north of the road, are the remains of a rock dam on Sage Creek. The purpose of the dam was to irrigate certain farms in the Bowler Flats, west of the Pryors. But the dam was never put to that use. Stories conflict on the reasons for its nonfunctioning. One source told me the builders, Datliff Thormahlen and Jim Polly, simply ran out of money. Another source claims the builders could not get enough dirt to line it. Bert Schwend thought the Bents of Bowler Flats, claiming entire water rights on Sage Creek, blew the bottom of the dam out! Although no proof exists that can substantiate this accusation, fights over water rights were pretty common on Bowler Flats. During the twenties and thirties, water was a scarce commodity on the flats. But Frank Clift of Columbus, former mail clerk on the Toluca-Cody railroad line that ran through the Pryors, said the Bents did not blow up the dam. "The water just sank below the dam!"

Along the same Sage Creek Road occurred an ambush of Crow Indians by a couple of local cattlemen. Occurring around 1917 or 1918, the ambush happened at the "Battleground," the bend in the road where Sage Creek and the canyon wall come close to each other. The old Fenner ranch, now owned by Claude Lewis, is right around the bend from where the ambush took place. Stories vary on the circumstances that led to the ambush. Some feel the Crows were asking for it!



"Teton Jack" Cave



Indian Springs Cabin

Cattle would wander onto the reservation, and the white man would have to pay \$1.00 to \$1.25 a head to get them back. Some claim that the Crows deliberately drove the cattle onto the reservation. Others claim that some ranchers deliberately ran their cattle on Indian land to gain extra grazing territory. Any how, Toots Brown and Mike Wrote, incensed over the "cattle levy" charged by the Crows, waited one day atop the hills above "Battleground" bend to "square" things with the Indians. After the shooting was over, three Indians laid dead and one wounded. Whites in the Pryors that night must have been a little jittery, wondering whether the Crows would retaliate. Jim Kelsey of Crooked Creek, Pat Marchant's great-uncle, told his wife Edna (later married to Frank Anderson) what happened on Sage Creek. Then, to scare her, he told her the "Indians were on the warpath." Edna did not wait around. She grabbed a blanket and went out and slept for the night on a nearby ridge, afraid of the supposedly revengeful Crows. Meanwhile, husband Jim stayed inside nice and warm, laughing quietly to himself.

Anyway, the Crows did not retaliate. Toots Brown and Mike Wrote subsequently were arrested and convicted. Both went to Fort Leavenworth, but Toots only served around five years because of his age, being only 17 at the time of the ambush. Mike was released years later because of illness.

Art Graham of Bridger told me that his father was nearby when the ambush took place. He had warned Mike Wrote that he would be arrested if he did any shooting. Toots was a good friend of Art Graham. Art told me that other people were involved in the shooting, taking shots at the Indians from the creek bed. They were never caught. Art did not know their names, but he would not have told me, even if he knew!

Along the road to Big Ice Cave, there sits the remnants of a cabin, not too far from the road's intersection with the Crooked Creek and Sage Creek Roads. Hugh Kelsey, older brother of Jim Kelsey, built that cabin in the early 1900's. "Hugh, like many cowboys of his time, augmented his income by doing a little rustling."³ Pretty soon he was able to set up his own ranch down on Lower Crooked Creek. His cattle rustling eventually put him at odds with the law. This necessitated a quick exit to Canada, sometime before 1910. No one knows why Hugh built that cabin up along the road there. But, according to the Marchants, Hugh must have had some interesting guests stopping by at the cabin. One guest carved his name on the cabin. It was "Kid Curry," who belonged to the Butch Cassidy gang! The name is no longer there, carved out by some souvenir hunter.

Up above the Kelsey cabin in the timber, there are the remains of an old cabin built for "Ma" Strong in the early 1900's. No reasons could be found on why it was rebuilt.

Hugh Kelsey was not the only one accused of cattle rustling. A famous rustling trial took place during the early days in Red Lodge. B. M. (Bud) Phelps and a William Sherrin were charged for attempting to rustle around 55 head of cattle belonging to C. A. Dana of Dryhead. Dana's cattle usually grazed around the northern boundary of the forest preserve. But one day they were spotted 20-30 miles from their accustomed range,



Tie Flats - open space at base of mtn.



Strong Cabin



Hugh Kelsey's Cabin

heading down Crooked Creek near Demijohn Flat. Phelps, along with Mrs. Phelps and Sherrin, were seen in the vicinity on horseback. They said they had been in charge of a party of three dudes from Bud's parents' (Mr. and Mrs. Charles Phelps) Lone Wolf Ranch in Dryhead. They protested to the posse, made up of ranchers from Sage Creek, that they knew nothing of the cattle herd nearby. Ultimately, Phelps and Sherrin were found not guilty.

Sage Creek was first known to the Indians as "Yellow Willow." Art Graham of Bridger claims his father (A. P. Graham) was one of the first settlers along Upper Sage Creek, arriving there around 1895. In 1896-97, A. P. Graham hauled mine timbers from the Pryors to Bridger where they were used to shore up mines. He also had the first mining claim on West Pryor. Art says the family still has around 2,000 acres of claims in the Pryors. But people with small claims, like themselves, cannot afford to mine them. He said, "Anaconda is just waiting for people who have claims to die off!"

During the early days, there were a lot of sawmills and lumbering operations in the Pryors. The Schwends of Upper Sage Creek built a sawmill not too far from the present-day Schwend Ranch.

Bert Schwend also had a sawmill at Tibbs Hollow on Crooked Creek. The hollow acquired its name from a cattleman from Cowley named Tibbs. He used to run sheep up there in the early 1900's. Another sawmill was built by Stevens. He bought the Spencer homestead (Spencer has homesteaded it in 1909) on Sage Creek in 1918. A sawmill existed there for many years. Heman Smith later bought the place and leased out the sawmill, but it was used very little. Bill and Nancy Poole live there now. The sawmill is no longer in operation. Homer Wilhelm of Pryor said the Stevens' sawmill was also a cabinet factory. Homer should know, he used to haul lumber from there back in 1926. Bert Schwend used to haul lumber from the Harvey Ray (who once owned the present-day Schwend ranch) sawmill. It was located less than one-half of a mile up from Hugh Kelsey's cabin on the road to the Big Ice Cave. Bert Schwend said it was built sometime during the mid-twenties. Today, little remains of the old sawmill.

Dick Godfrey of Cowley said his father used to work at the Schow brothers sawmill. It was located near Wyoming Creek and Crooked Creek. Later on, the area where the sawmill once stood was used as a campground. Today, there is no evidence left of either. Dick Godfrey, only eleven years old at the time, used to haul lumber down to Cowley with his older brother. The lumber was used to build the old schoolhouse there.

A number of logging operations took place back then on what is called "Tie Flats," located on the ridge west of where the Crooked Creek Road begins. The men who worked there were called "Tiehackers," because they built the ties for the railroad. Bert Schwend thought there were 200 or more "Tiehackers" up there at one time. Their main source of entertainment, according to Bert, was a bar and a "flop house," owned by Baxter Zachery. Dick Godfrey thought the only settlement on "Tie Flats" consisted of tents. His older brother used to haul lumber from



Sage Creek Ranger Station



Rock Dam on Sage Creek

there around 1912-1913. Heman Smith felt that the only building on "Tie Flats" was a cook shack. "There wasn't a saloon; everything was just out of your own bottle."

Other early Sage Creek residents included the Shrivvers and Cummings, both whose ranches were close together on Upper Sage Creek. Today, the Schwends own both of these ranches. The Cummings had the first Post Office in that area. "It was established in January of 1910, but closed up operations a short time afterwards, in April, 1911. Blanche Cummings was postmaster. In July of 1915, a Post Office was established at the Shriver Ranch, with Nettie T. Shriver as Postmaster."⁴ It must have remained in existence until at least the thirties, because Homer Wilhelm's brother, Garth, hauled mail from Shriver in the early 1930's.

Just outside the Forest Service boundary sits Indian Springs cabin. It is on the south side of Sage Creek and the road. It was reportedly built by Crow Indians working for the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) during the early 1930's. It was used as an Indian Police Station for awhile. The spring is the "last chance" for clear, cold, spring water, if one is heading west towards the arid Bowler Flats.

If one turns north at Indian Springs, one would be heading towards the one-time "Cheese Factory," reportedly in operation between 1916-1918. It was opposite the remains of Snyder's Commissary, on the Crow Reservation. The owners used to make cheese from sheep and goat's milk. It was never too successful. One source claims that the "winters were too tough for them." Dick Godfrey once worked nearby as a sheep foreman for C. A. Lewis. He feels that the proprietors were not too careful in making sure the fecal remains of the sheep did not end up in the cheese!

As it was in the early days, livestock raising is the main occupation today on Sage Creek.



Shriver Ranch - Post Office in Foreground



Typical Early Settlement on Upper Sage Creek - Shriver Ranch

V. Early Settlements - Bowler Flats and West Pryor Area

As Sage Creek heads southward, it runs through the Bowler Flats. This flat, rocky-soil country lies at the base of Big Pryor Mountain. Presently, much of the "Flat" is being irrigated by Newmont Resources Corporation. On the western part of the "Flats," at the intersection of the road to Bridger, stands the old Bowler Store. The Post Office that it used to house closed in 1936. The store closed altogether in 1938. Over the door may still be seen the fading name of "Bowler." But two other Bowlers preceded this one. The first Bowler was born out of the "ceded strip" in 1892. Jack Bowler, a former soldier of the U. S. Seventh Cavalry at Fort Custer, was one of the first settlers on the "Flats." "Like other settlers, Bowler hauled logs from the Pryors to build his house."¹ Eventually, the Bowlers' place became an overnight road ranch, taking advantage of the stage and freight route that passed nearby. The Bowlers had a good reputation for hospitality, "The only limit on helpings of food was the amount a stomach could hold!"²

Previous to 1895, Sage Creek residents had to ride to Billings to get their mail. In 1895, mail service began between Billings and the Big Horn Basin. Naturally, the Bowler road ranch was selected for a Post Office site. In 1901, the CB & Q (Chicago, Burlington and Quincy) Railroad began its service through Bowler, signaling the end for the first Bowler. Mail and freight were sent by train. So, a new Post Office was established along the tracks which were east of the Bowler ranch.

The train was a boon for Bowler. Besides the Post Office, a few stores and a saloon were established. The Bemish family ran one of the stores and the Post Office. A "big store" (had everything) was run by Billy Gardner. Johnny Hanley was the popular saloon keeper. When the railroad was abandoned in 1911, the second Bowler went the way of the first. The third Bowler was established when residents pushed for a new Post Office. It was eventually established in the store at the intersection of Bridger Canyon Road. The store-Post Office was run by a McKissick and in the thirties by Bill Miller. "During the time McKissick ran the store, Bowler experienced its greatest growth with the influx of many dryland farmers. These farmers borrowed large sums of money from insurance companies to buy equipment and fertilizers."³ But these farmers went into debt when this salt sageland failed to bloom. With little or no irrigation, the land was too dry to support a lot of farmers. This, along with the Depression, was the final blow for Bowler.

There were a lot of homesteads in Bowler at one time. Between 1908-1910, ten to fifteen families lived on the "Flats." There were up to forty families later on. Even during the mid-thirties, about 35 kids went to school in Bowler. The school house was located one-half mile south of the last Bowler store. The old school house has since been moved to Bridger, where it houses the town library. Evidence of habitation in the Bowler area can be found at the cemetery, where around 35 people are buried.



Bowler Store



Bowler Lime Kiln



Big Pryor Mtn. from Bowler Flat

Jesse Godfrey, of Cowley, lived on Bowler Flats, with her husband, for seven years (1922-1929). "Seven years too long," she contended. They leased land on the George Crosby ranch. The house the Godfreys lived in used to be the section house at Crockett, which had been located along the railroad at the north end of the "Flats." When the railroad was torn up, the Crosbys bought the section house and moved it to their Bowler ranch.

Many of the early settlers must have made use of the lime kiln nearby for the building of their homes. The kiln was "run by Gust Anderson at one time."⁴ Today, the remains of the kiln are very evident, located along the old railroad grade at the base of the hills east of Bowler, a couple of miles south of the Sage Creek Road - Pryor Creek Road intersection.

Today, all is silent on the Bowler Flats, except for the sound of Pryor Mountain-bound autos.

Before the railroad, the stage line and freight haulers used to pass through the "Flats," on the way to the Big Horn Basin. Cook and Morgan used to own this stage line. Jack Hash and Lon Cribbs were stage coach drivers on the line. South of Bowler the stage used to stop at Coyote Springs (north of Warren). Art Graham told me that his uncle, Jay King, used to run a road ranch at the springs. Art's father (A. P. Graham) also used to drive a stage from Coyote Springs to Lovell for about a year. A. P. Graham also used to run a freight outfit at the mouth of Piney Creek, southwest of the Pryors near Warren. Along with his wife, they also ran a little eating house, where many freighters stopped. Lon Cribbs said that, "Mrs. Graham did all the work. He (Allan) was too lazy to do anything but hunt rabbits."⁵

The old Bainbridge ranch was on Piney Creek, where the Loyning ranch or the Lewis ranch is today. The Bainbridges were two brothers and a sister from England. They ran cattle on Piney Creek at one time. She was "very proper," claiming to be of royal blood. The first Post Office on Piney Creek was located on the Jordan Bean homestead (now the Rule ranch) between 1894-1900. "This Post Office was an apple box in Mr. Bean's log-cabin living room!"⁶ After 1900, the mail was handled from Bowler. Residents of Crooked Creek and Gyp Creek had to come all the way to Bean to get their mail in those days.⁷



Author and "Sundown" at the Crockett Water Tower Foundations

VI. Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad - Toluca-Cody Line

The life span of the CB & Q (Chicago, Burlington & Quincy) Railroad from Toluca, Montana, to Cody, Wyoming, was from 1901-1911. Actually, it was the B&M (Burlington & Missouri) Railroad that built the line. "Originally, there were two Burlington Railroads. The CB & Q was based in Illinois, and the B&M was based in Iowa. They merged in July of 1880, but the B&M name still stuck in Wyoming, although not in Montana."¹

The railroad was surveyed during the spring of 1899. Work started the following spring, in 1900. The first train arrived in Cody on November 11, 1901. The line started in Toluca, Montana (along the old Hardin Road), then proceeded west to Coburn, and then south towards the Pryors and the Big Horn Basin, making stops at Morin, Keiser, Pryor, Chicopee, Oswald, Crockett, Bowler, Scribner, Frannie, Mantua, Garland, Powell, Ralston, McCormick, Corbett, and Cody. The grade through the Pryor Gap was the toughest, especially around the tunnel in the north end of the Gap. "Completion of this line was a boon to the basin area, for it saved up to 60 to 100 miles in the hauling of freight to the basin."² Passengers from Billings usually took a coach to Coburn to catch the train going south.

The Toluca-Cody line was called the "Squaw Train," because a sizeable number of the train's patrons were Indians. C. J. Merritt, former conductor on the line, recalled how costly it was to keep up the line. There was a lack of business in the Indian country. The train was hardly ever on time. One of the reasons was because of the steep grades. "The weather frequently disrupted the schedule that often slowed the train to 25-30 m.p.h. by the washing out of track and bridges."³

The train would get "lost" in the Pryors. The only stations with telegraph connections were Coburn, Pryor, Frannie and Garland. Therefore, if a train was stalled or broken down in between these stations, no one knew where the train was, except the crew and its passengers.⁴ Other delays were caused by the heavy growth of weeds along the track, especially along the grade near Crockett. An accident occurred there one time when the train brakes failed due to the slickness of the tracks, caused by the crushed weeds. Fortunately, no one was seriously injured.

Exciting moments on the Pryor Mountain line included a baby being born in the baggage car. There was not a doctor until Cody, but the expectant mother could not wait. When the railroad was completed in November, 1901, there was a big celebration in Cody, with "Buffalo Bill" picking up the entire tab! Sometime between 1906-1908, sparks from a train's engine caused sporadic fires in the middle of Pryor Gap. Before the fires ended, 10,000 acres of timber had been destroyed. Supposedly, fire lines can still be seen along the limestone rims of the Gap. Jesse Godfrey recalls that when she was a child living in Scribner (near Warren), she used to notice those sparks up in the Gap.

The Mormons built the railroad bed from the tunnel in Pryor Gap to Scribner. Jesse Godfrey's father (Mortensen) was involved in the operation. He helped dig the Pryor Gap tunnel in 1900. The whole family camped out in the Gap. Mrs. Godfrey and her sister Laura caught typhoid during that time. This might be related to the epidemic that reportedly hit that area around that time. Eight to ten railroad laborers supposedly died of smallpox while building the tunnel. Others claim that a tunnel cave-in killed the men. Anyhow, the cemetery for these men lies a little north of the tunnel and the Gap.

Jesse Godfrey's father was also involved in the building of the railroad spur from Warren to Fromberg in 1910. The whole family camped at Scribner during that time. The railroad company of Crosby, Willis, and Welch sub-contracted the building of the spur to Jesse's father and her husband's father. While at Scribner, Mrs. Godfrey's mother worked as the cook in the commissary which was run by a Mr. Ketchum.

Scribner was a stop on the railroad near Warren. "Ma" Brown had an overnight place there. According to Dick Nelson, former conductor on the CB & Q, a water tank and a section house were also there. Both structures were later moved to Warren when the new line from Warren to Fromberg was put into operation (1911), connecting with the Northern Pacific tracks from Billings.⁵

Frank Clift was a former mail clerk on the Toluca-Cody line during 1906-1907. The mail clerk handled all the mail at each stop. Mr. Clift recalled that Scribner was actually "old" Warren. He said Scribner was nothing more than a "side-track," tracks running parallel to the main tracks where freight and wood for woodburning engines were loaded aboard. Oswald and Chickapee in the Pryor Gap were also just "side-tracks." Mr. Clift did say there was a "dugout" at Scribner, a building hollowed out in the side of a ground bank. It was used as a saloon, operated by Mr. McFarland.

According to Mr. Clift, the section houses at Pryor, Coburn, Crockett, and Frannie were where work crews lived in order to be nearby to keep up the track. "A lot of Japanese track men in those days," Mr. Clift recalled. He remembers seeing Bill Cody on the train a number of times. Mr. Clift remembers that "Buffalo Bill" was not too popular with the "old-timers." Either the "old-timers" were jealous of Bill, or resented his hard drinking, and the half-a-dozen hanger-ons that formed his entourage. "Probably the reason Bill Cody was always broke," Frank Clift contended.

The section house-boarding house at Crockett, located at the south end of the Gap, or in "Section House Draw," was run by a Mr. and Mrs. Charles Reynolds. Their daughter, Harriet Clemens, lives today in Wellington, Colorado. She told me that her parents ran the section house during 1905-1906. Her father was the section foreman. Her mother ran the boarding house. Railroad work crews and travelers stayed at the boarding house, along with the Reynolds family. Foundations of the

old water tower at Crockett are evident alongside the railroad bed, about one-half a mile north of the Pryor Creek - Sage Creek Road intersection. The foundations consist of four elongated cemented blocks. The section house was on the other side of the railroad across from the water tower. Water for the tower was piped from Sage Creek. Mrs. Clemens said there is still evidence of broken pipe along the creek bed today. Behind the water tower there was once an old railroad box car, where migrants and hobos used to stay. The ridge above the water tower used to be spotted with elevated Indian graves.

Although only six or seven at the time, Mrs. Clemens remembers the Fourth of July celebrations in Pryor Gap. The Crows used to set up tepees and have dance ceremonies throughout the night. Mrs. Clemens accompanied her parents to these festivities, being the only whites in attendance. She also remembers her parents visiting Plenty Coups up in Pryor.

Jim Donley of Cowley told me that as the train made its usual slow way up the grade near Crockett, "every kid used to jump on the coal cars during the winter months to obtain fuel for their homes!"

According to Homer Wilhelm of Pryor, one can still find nuts, bolts, and spikes along the old railroad grade through the Gap. One can also still walk through the railroad tunnel at the north end of the Gap. After the railroad ceased operations in 1911, people swarmed in and took whatever they could get their hands on! A lot of the wood from railroad bridges and ties were used as lumber for houses built in Pryor and in Billings.

The railroad needed soft water for the use in their locomotives, and at the stations and section houses. The water they were using had a high mineral content. It was unhealthy for human consumption, and had a corrosive effect on the engine's boilers. So, Jack (who previously won a water rights case on Sage Creek) sold his water rights on Piney Creek to the railroad for \$20,000. He demanded payment in straight cash! Secrecy prevailed over the transactions. A couple of agents for the railroad delivered Morris the money by renting a private railroad car under the guise of going to Wyoming to do some bird hunting. They left their private car on the siding at Scribner and proceeded to the Morris ranch and gave him twenty, one-thousand dollar bills! Although Morris had demanded cash, I guess he had no idea the railroad would give it to him in one lump sum on his ranch. He refused the money, saying he could get killed if anybody found out that he had such money on his ranch. So, arrangements were made to make the transfer of payment at Yegen Brothers Bank in Billings."⁶

The steep grade in Pryor Gap; the slowness of the trains; the convenience of making connections at Billings, rather than at Coburn; and a more productive and profitable route through the Clarks Fork Valley, were all cited as reasons for the abandonment of the Pryor Mountain line. Actually, it was the stretch from Toluca to Warren that was affected. In early April of 1911, the thirty miles of track built

between Fromberg and Warren were completed. They connected up with the Northern Pacific track from Billings to Fromberg. This improved the situation, not only for the railroad in eliminating the expense and slowness of the Pryor Mountain route, but also for the whole basin area. According to author David Wasden, the re-routing of the CB & Q was "more than any other factor, largely responsible for economical growth and development of the basin."⁷

Art Graham told me that another reason for the termination of the railroad through the Pryors was because a lot of Indian cattle were injured, and fields of grain burnt, caused by passing locomotives. The compensations paid to the Indians became too expensive for the railroad.

"The decision to re-route may not have been so sudden to the line's officers, but it came as surprise news to the employees."⁸ Conductor C. J. Merritt did not know until a couple hours before his daily run! On the morning of April 13, 1911, Merritt received a call at 3 a.m. telling him that the train would be taken over the Northern Pacific tracks at 5 a.m. Speed was a necessity in abandoning the line. The Crows were attempting to get an injunction, but it was a Sunday, so a federal judge was not available. Work began late Saturday night by the railroad in removing the tracks. They finished early Monday morning. All the station buildings, water tanks and equipment houses were left behind. With some of the employees kept in the dark about the transfer until almost the last minute, "many station agents were stranded at their posts. Wagons were sent out to haul them in."⁹

So, the train line through the Pryors came to an end. Today, only autos follow the old railroad bed from Pryor Gap to Warren.

VII. South of the Pryors - Lovell, Cowley and the Big Horn Basin

Northern Wyoming and the Big Horn Basin have heavily influenced the history of the Pryors, as shown in my discussion of the events that led to the establishment of the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range. The first big settlement on the Wyoming side of the Pryors was Lovell. The town was named after Henry Clay Lovell, who first came to Wyoming on a scouting trip in 1878. In 1879, he brought cattle into the Big Horn Basin where he first settled on Nowood Creek. By 1883, 25,000 head of cattle ranged on his "M-L" ranch, near Kane, Wyoming. It was the largest cattle ranch in the eastern part of the basin.¹ In the day of the open range, the "M-L" cattle stretched from Thermopolis, Wyoming, to the Crow lands in the north.

Lovell is part of Big Horn County, which was formed in 1890. The county got its name from the Rocky Mountains or Big Horn sheep. Cowley, the little community northwest of Lovell, was named after an apostle of the Mormon Church. It was originally a Mormon settlement, with sixteen families arriving during the winter of 1900-1901. Deaver, just west of Cowley, was named after the late D. Clem Deaver, colonization agent for the Burlington Railroad. A tent city at first, Deaver had a Post Office, Railroad Depot and other stores by 1917.² Frannie, just south of the Montana-Wyoming border, is the "biggest little town in Wyoming." The town was named after Frannie Morris, expert horsewoman in "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show," and daughter of Jack Morris, who had a road ranch nearby. Frannie has another distinction. It is the only town in the United States with that name!³

Jack Morris located his ranch on Sage Creek, near Frannie, around 1885. It was a road house for many years for travelers going east and west through the basin and north towards the Pryor Gap and Billings. It was on the stage-line route that went from Billings to Basin City. "The Morris place consisted of a bar room, a kitchen, a dining room, bedrooms, and a big empty building where the grocery used to be. There was also a barn for forty head of horses."⁴ Jack Morris and T. N. Howell claimed they had first water rights on Sage Creek. As other settlers located on Sage Creek on the Montana side of the border, they diverted water to their lands, leaving Morris with hardly any water. "A suit was filed by Morris against 25 residents of Montana along Sage Creek."⁵ Many hard feelings developed among the early settlers as the case worked its way up in federal courts. Eventually, Morris won his case.

Another conflict that created uneasiness between the new Mormon settlers and the early Pryor Mountain settlers was over the issue of Mormon logging operations on public lands in Montana. The Mormons of Wyoming needed lumber to build their homes. So the Schow brothers of Cowley set up a sawmill in the Pryors, near Wyoming Creek and Crooked Creek. "But the residents in Montana objected. They contended that a federal statute provided that the use of timber taken from public lands was limited to use by residents of the state in which it was found."⁶ But pressure from Congressman Mondell (Wyoming) got Congress to pass legislation making the public lands in the Pryors an exception. The residents of both Montana and Wyoming could make use of the timber.

Range wars between cattlemen and sheepmen was a conflict of a more serious nature, especially in the Big Horn Basin. Both groups vied for the open range. By the end of the 19th century, there was still no fixed laws on the usage of the range. Hence, overcrowding produced conflict. "So President Theodore Roosevelt appointed a public land commission to study the problem. Out of this commission came the eventual United States Forest Service and the Taylor Grazing Acts, to prevent overgrazing of the range through federal control. But control only came about after violent and bitter range wars, with the most violent in Wyoming. Cattlemen killed thousands of sheep and a number of sheepherders."⁷ So the entire Big Horn Basin was the victim of terrorist cattle groups. It even spread to the Pryor Mountains, where cattlemen rimrocked George Crosby's band of sheep, killing around 500 head.⁸ It occurred on West Pryor Mountain around 1910, instigated by some Crooked Creek cowboys. Edna Anderson knew who some of those cowboys were. But when interviewed by Rulon Crosby thirteen years ago, Edna would not reveal the names because some of those cowboys were still alive. There was also resentment against Claude Lewis, during the twenties, when he started building his extensive sheep ranching empire in the Pryors. Some of his sheep wagons were set afire.

But after 1910, range wars diminished; one reason being that law officials began to prosecute crimes committed on the range. "Murders committed on the open range would no longer go unpunished, so long as evidence could be found upon which to build a case."⁹

"For forty years, people in the Dryhead and Crooked Creek country depended upon Kane as their trading center. Kane was located close to the south end of the canyon where the Big Horn River cuts through between the Big Horn Mountains and the Pryor Mountains. In its heyday, Kane had a bank, two hotels, two general stores, a pool hall, dance hall, and a Post Office. Today, because of the Yellowtail Dam, most of what was Kane lies under water. The Kane community was first settled when the "M-L" ranch was established, during the mid-eighties. In 1895, the first Kane Post Office was located on the "M-L" ranch, and Henry Lovell was the Postmaster."¹⁰

When the Mormons settled on the north side of the Shoshone River around 1900, they established the community of Iona, a couple of miles from Kane. Their sugar-beet industry, along with the railroad, were the two chief reasons for the growth of Kane. "The Mormons were partly responsible for the transformation of the Big Horn Basin from cattle country to a highly productive farming area through open canal irrigation. Since most of the Big Horn River Valley and the Shoshone River Valley are bordered by badlands, the amount of moisture is insufficient for the production of native grass. The salt sage was ideally suited to reclamation by irrigation."¹¹ The Mormons had a heritage of raising sheep rather than cattle. Their building of the grade for the Burlington Railroad fenced off the cattle from the river, causing the cattle to decline in number. Also, sheep were better suited for grazing in salt-sage country.

Jesse Godfrey recalled that Cowley used to sport a population of around two thousand. Today, Cowley has just a few hundred people. The reason, she feels, is twofold. "The Mormons used too much water in their irrigation. The soil became too alkaline." The lack of jobs in the area caused the

young to drift away. The young have drifted away from other Pryor Mountain communities, like Bowler, Warren, Dryhead country, etc. All had larger populations at one time. This is evident in many rural areas across America.

Up in the foothills of the South Pryors are the remains of a "Gyp Kiln." It was used by the first settlers to make gyp blocks and bricks for use in construction of their homes, especially in the Cowley area. The kiln is located on the Montana-Wyoming border, south of the Gyp Springs Road - Crooked Creek Road intersection, just north of the cattleguard, and east of the road on Gypsum Creek. George Teeples, who homesteaded on Gypsum (or Gyp) Creek near Lovell (in 1889), might have had a hand in constructing the kiln. Dick Godfrey thinks Teeples used the kiln to make bricks for his house on Gypsum Creek.

In a way, many aspects of Pryor Mountain history were more influenced by events in Wyoming than in Montana where most of the Pryors are located. The reason being that the best access to the Pryors, especially to the Dryhead country and the Bighorn Canyon, is from the south, from the Lovell and the Big Horn Basin area.



Crooked Creek Canyon



Gyp Kiln near Gypsum Creek

VIII. Crooked Creek Country

"The Land God Forgot" - Bessie Tillett of Crooked Creek, Montana

Crooked Creek begins in the northern sector of the National Forest, "where quite a large volume of water gushes from an opening in the porous madison limestone."¹ It heads downward on a southeasterly course, as it winds "crookedly" through a progressively deeper and rugged canyon. From personal experience, there are not many ways to get out of the canyon once you are at the bottom. As the canyon gets deeper, the only ways out are the several hollows along the way. "Eight miles from its spring-fed origin, Crooked Creek breaks out of its narrow canyon and onto the more level land of the foot of the Pryor uplift."² Eventually, it flows into the Big Horn River.

One of the first Crooked Creek settlers, Henry Steers, sold his ranch to a John Kujah, supposedly of Dutch-Boer descent. Soon thereafter, dissension arose between Kujah and his fellow neighbors, the Kelseys and the Brittons. Kujah accused them of rustling and butchering his cattle. Dissension led to violence, when Kujah took a shot one day at Nobel Britton, killing him. C. D. Delahoyde, who had been with Britton, got away. Kujah thought it was wise that he remove himself quickly from Crooked Creek, but not until he evened the score with Jim Kelsey. Bessie Tillett recalls that Kujah headed towards a sheepherders' camp where Jim Kelsey supposedly was. But when Kujah got there, Kelsey was nowhere to be found. Little did Kujah know that Kelsey was fast asleep in a sheep wagon. It was probably the most valuable nap Jim Kelsey took in his life! "Kujah was reported to have returned to his native South Africa."³

The Strong and Tillett families have influenced much of the history of the Pryor Mountains, as I have already noted in the events that led to the establishment of the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range. Bessie Strong Tillett (born November, 1889) and Edna Strong Anderson (July, 1885) came with their parents to the Lovell area in 1894. Their parents opened the successful Strong Hotel and Saloon in Lovell. Frank Strong was also involved in the building of the first irrigation canals in the Lovell area. "In 1903, the Strongs bought the Hugh Kelsey ranch and two others on Crooked Creek."⁴ A few years later, the whole Strong family moved to Crooked Creek to live.

Frank Strong also had contracts with the government to carry the mail to the Dryhead, Crooked Creek and Kane area. Edna carried the mail by horse-back for a number of years. Bessie also carried the mail on and off between 1905-1910.

Around 1902, Frank Strong and others were involved in a shooting spree near Medicine Creek (previously known as Davis Creek) in the Dryhead country. It all got started when Frank Strong decided to have the Ewing boys run some of his cattle in the Dryhead. Link Hannen and Harry Mogan, Dryhead ranchers, did not take much to what they considered the Strong encroachment of "their" range. So, Hannen and Mogan rimrocked 28 of Strong's cattle in the Big Horn River! Hearing of this, Frank Strong, Lee Ewing and Ed Morse headed towards Hannen's ranch near Medicine Creek to even the score. A shootout occurred and Ed Morse was slightly wounded.

Frank Strong, thinking Morse was dead, and Ewing nowhere to be seen, "got the terrible feeling that he was facing Hannen and his henchmen alone, so he ran for the nearest horse and vacated the area as fast as possible. As the story goes, Hugh Kelsey is supposed to have seen Frank riding 'towards town and started after him to give him a letter to mail. Frank, thinking that he was being pursued by Hannen, nearly killed his horse getting away."⁵ After the shootout, Hannen became paranoid over the fact that maybe Strong and his men would return. So Hannen stayed indoors for a good while. When he had to venture from his cabin to get water, he would disguise himself in his wife's clothes in order not to get shot at.

Bessie Tillett said no one was arrested for rimrocking her father's cattle. She remembers Hannen being arrested many times in his life, but he was never convicted.

Around the same time, Edna Strong married her first of three husbands, Jim Kelsey. Not too long after, Hugh Kelsey, who had come back to Crooked Creek around the time of the Strong-Hannen incident, asked his brother to hide him from the law. Hugh had been arrested in Livingston, Montana, for cattle rustling, but had jumped bail. Hugh, as mentioned in the Sage Creek chapter, had been involved earlier in cattle rustling around Crooked Creek. Years later, it was reported that cowhides were found in the roof of Hugh Kelsey's barn! Anyway, Jim hid Hugh down at Frank Sykes' place, then Edna took Hugh on her horse to Kane to catch the train to escape from the law. As the story goes, Edna complained bitterly about Hugh, because his suitcase wore the hide off her horse! Later, Hugh Kelsey made his way to Canada, "and established a ranch on the Peace River."⁶

When Frank Strong died in 1914, Bessie and her husband Bill Tillett moved to the original Hugh Kelsey ranch. "Ma" Strong moved into a house on the old Nobel Britton ranch owned today by the Tilletts.

There were many incidents of antagonism between cattle and sheepmen in the Pryors. In 1910, some Crooked Creek cowboys rimrocked five hundred of George Crosby's sheep upon West Pryor. During the twenties, one of Claude Lewis' sheep wagons was supposedly burned by the young Wess Britton. But "Ma" Strong, Jess Sullivan (Ma's foreman), and Jim Kelsey were accused of the act, but later cleared, because they were seen riding in the vicinity of the burning wagon.

"Since the twenties, things have been relatively calm in the Crooked Creek Valley. "Ma" Strong ran her ranch until she died in 1952, at the age of 82. Edna Strong Anderson had married twice since separated from Jim Kelsey. Her second husband, Andy Hefland, owned a considerable portion of the irrigated acreage on Lower Crooked Creek."⁷ Edna, lived her last, but active, years on what is now the Newton ranch. Bessie Strong Tillett and her two sons, Royce and Lloyd, live on the ranch that she inherited from her father back in 1914.

The Raymond Post Office, operative between 1910-1925, was located on the ranch where the Marchants live today. There are no remains left of the Post Office. Charles "Tuffy" Abbott, of Bridger, used to live with his parents at Raymond. Around 1909-1910, two men, whom the Abbotts found out later had robbed a bank in Denver, stopped by the Abbotts' ranch in Raymond for breakfast. "Tuffy" recalled that one of the men felt uneasy about eating with his back to the window so he moved to another place at the table! "Tuffy" said they ate, left twenty dollars, and were on their way. About a week later, a sheriff came by looking for the two men.

"After the turn of the century, most men in the northern Wyoming area did not wear guns, unless they were riding the open range or expecting trouble. Frank Sykes, however, wore his pistol all the time, up until the day he died."⁸ Before Frank Sykes came to Crooked Creek, he lived among the Shoshone Indians in central Wyoming. He was a mountain man and a trapper. In the early 1890's, Sykes and his wife, Ann Forsche, "squatted" on Lower Crooked Creek near Sykes Spring, just south of the "ceded strip." Sykes' cabin is near the road that leads into the Dryhead. "He built the cabin on high ground, so as to command all approaches."⁹ Sykes was suspicious of everyone, one reason he wore his pistol all the time. If one crossed Sykes, that person most likely would end up on Sykes' "Death List." Sykes had no intention of going out and hunting down his "enemies." But if his "enemies" were wise, he or she would not go near his place. "Mrs. Warren LaRoche, wife of a French-Canadian who had settled on Lower Crooked Creek in 1895, had befriended Mrs. Sykes (whom Frank was not on good terms with), possibly siding with her on a dispute with Frank. She earned a place on the 'Death List'!"¹⁰

Jim Kelsey almost earned a place on Sykes' "Death List." Jim was a good friend of Sykes, but he too had to be careful not to cross Frank. One time Jim stopped in to visit, leaving his horse outside eating hay. Sykes was preparing a dinner of potatoes cooked in bear grease. Sykes offered Jim some, which he politely took. When offered more, Jim declined. Sykes became incensed and put his hand on his gun and forcefully told Jim, "Go ahead and finish up these spuds, because you are going to eat potatoes just like that horse of yours is eating my hay."¹¹ Jim gained an aversion towards potatoes which he never got over.

George "Starky" Teeples did gain a place on the "Death List." One time Teeples asked Sykes if he could have some of his young plum trees, planted near Sykes' cabin. Sykes said okay but warned Teeples not to take any of his wife's trees. But Mrs. Sykes' trees looked better to "Starky," so he took them instead. When Sykes found out, he went straight to Teeples' place, drew his gun and forced Starky to cut them up into little pieces. He told Starky to "never come near his place again."¹²

Hiram Bischoff of Lovell knew Frank Sykes. Sykes used to come into Lovell with his wagon to get supplies. Several times Sykes would stay overnight in Dad Bischoff's blacksmith shop. Hiram also used to get plums from Sykes' place! A Lon Cribbs, former stage driver, claimed Sykes was a "nice man, he wasn't like a westerner or these other guys that were so rough. He was very quiet . . ." Frank Sykes died quietly in his cabin, during the early twenties.

As Rulon Crosby said in his study on Crooked Creek settlers, "They were hospitable to those who deserved hospitality and were willing to fight to preserve that which they had worked hard for."¹³ The pioneering, shooting and rustling that took place on Crooked Creek was typical of frontier cattle-raising areas in America.

IX. Dryhead Country

The Dryhead is located between Bighorn Canyon and the Pryor Mountains, beginning north of where Layout Creek empties into the Big Horn, and continuing north into the Crow Reservation. The Dryhead is mostly arid rangeland. It received its name from the huge number of buffalo skulls that were piled up one time at the base of a buffalo jump near the Dryhead Creek. As the pile grew, the Crows called the area the place of dry skulls, or "Dryheads."¹ About five and a half miles northeast of the Big Ice Cave, is Dryhead Overlook. At 8600-8700 feet, it offers a "top of the world" view of the Bighorn Canyon and the Dryhead. The long, green oasis of Dryhead Creek is clearly seen as it disappears into the deep canyon of the Big Horn River.

One of the first Post Offices in the Dryhead area was located on the Ewing ranch, from June, 1898, to August, 1908.² The Ewing homestead (west of Barry's Landing) was on Layout Creek, later known as Ewing Creek, and today known as Hough Creek. The Snells had the Ewing homestead from 1918-1950. The Sorensens were the last owners, before the Park Service bought it and set up the Hough Creek Ranger Station. After the Post Office was discontinued at Ewing, all mail in the Dryhead went to Pryor. In 1915, a Post Office was set up on C. W. Barry's "Cedarvale Dude Ranch" located near what today is called Barry's Landing. Called Hillsboro (Montana), the Post Office was in operation until 1945, when it closed due to lack of business. C. W. Barry's stepson, Claude St. John, became the Postmaster in June of 1920.

A Post Office was also opened on Dryhead Creek, from July, 1919, to August, 1924. "Tuffy" Abbott used to pack mail from Kane to the Dryhead, between 1934-1946. He first delivered to the Dryhead Post Office on Deadman's Creek. It was later moved to the Kearns place on Sheep Springs, north of Deadman's Creek. Then the Post Office moved again to Bert Smiths at the head of Deadman's Creek, where it was finally discontinued in 1946.

Bighorn Canyon, situated between the Pryors and the Big Horn Mountains, now holds Yellowtail Reservoir. Before the damming of the river, Beverly St. John (Claude St. John's wife) took what she called a "breathhtaking" boat trip down the canyon's rapids. Calling it "God's Country," Mrs. St. John claimed the Bighorn Canyon was "probably the second greatest chasm in the United States. It was about 100 miles in length, with its vertical walls of solid limestone measuring 400 to 2000 feet in depth."³ Because of its inaccessibility, it was probably the last canyon in the United States to be explored by foot in its entirety. It was first done during the early 1890's by a Burlington Railroad surveying crew led by Edward Gillette, a locating engineer for the railroad.

One of the first settlers along the Big Horn was a doctor from New York, C. W. Barry. He is famous for his Cedarvale ranch, one of the first dude ranches in the west. It was located in the Trail Creek valley near Barry's Landing. What buildings remain are owned by the Park Service. "Tuffy" Abbott claims that the little cabin on the ranch was where Barry first lived when he came out here from New York. Tuffy feels

that Barry set up in such a secluded area because he was hiding out from New York law officials. The Abbotts eventually became neighbors of the Barrys when they established a ranch six to seven miles north of Barry's Landing, under the mountains on the east side of the Big Horn. Dr. Barry had occasionally visited and stayed overnight at the Abbott place in Raymond. After Barry gained a foothold in the area, he sent for his wife Edith, and his stepson, Claude St. John.

Dr. Barry, believing in the legend of a secret gold mine in the Pryors, attempted to dredge for gold in 1907. Barry was vice-president and general manager of the "Big Horn Gold Dredging Company." The newspaper, the Red Lodge Picket, felt the gold strike would "yield enough placer gold within a few seasons by the use of the improved stream dredge to make him (Barry) and his associates immensely rich."⁴ He even got U. S. Steel to invest \$50,000! But the gold in the area "proved to be too fine for successful dredging operations."⁵ U. S. Steel was not the only one left with a bad investment. Jesse Godfrey feels that the gold bonds that Barry sold were sort of a fake. "He got into some trouble with holders back east," said Mrs. Godfrey. She knew Barry personally. Mrs. Godfrey worked in a store in Cowley where Barry shopped for supplies.

Frank Strong intended not to get short-changed by his original investment into Barry's dredging scheme. The Marchants said that Strong came after Barry and demanded his money back. Strong stuck his pistol into C. W.'s ear and made him write a note of payment. Later, after Strong left, Barry wrote a letter claiming the note was "null and void" because of the circumstances under which he had to write the note.

But Barry's dude ranch was a successful venture. It remained in operation until the late 1950's. Today, Cedarvale or Hillsboro is a ghost town. But Barry's vision of the Bighorn Canyon as a potential recreational area is still alive, with the establishment of the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area.

Further north in the Dryhead country, Dryhead Creek empties into the Big Horn River a couple of miles north of the Crow Reservation - Carbon County line. Further up the creek aways is the Dryhead ranch, presently owned by Claude Lewis, and presently occupied by the Austin C. Marchants who run Indian cattle on the reservation as well as their own animals on the Dryhead ranch. The original homesteaders of the Dryhead ranch were Charlie and Emma Phelps. The land was allotted to them in 1907, and a patent granted in 1915. There was at one time a schoolhouse on the ranch.

A couple of well-known authors have lived in the Dryhead. Carolyn Lockhart used to live on the ranch that is known today as the Tippetts ranch. Jesse Godfrey complained about Miss Lockhart's manners. Mrs. Godfrey recalled that in the early days, there was a "law of the open road." When travelers came along, you fed them. It was the customary thing to do. But Miss Lockhart did not do this, because Jesse's husband once stopped by the Lockhart's after a long day on the range, and Miss Lockhart refused to feed him. The Dryhead also attracted

Will James. His home, about 15 miles northwest of Dryhead Creek, was where he did his illustrations for his western books.

The Dryhead had its share of cattle rustling. One such episode took place around Garvin Basin (opposite Barry's Landing), so-named after one of the instigators, Sam Garvin, who rustled some Indian cattle with Bob Lee. In 1893, Sam Garvin located his cattle in an inaccessible section of the Crow Reservation in a basin along the Big Horn. It was so isolated that it was not until 1900 before agent T. E. Edwards cornered Garvin and collected \$200 for lease of the basin. Soon thereafter, several hundred head of Indian cattle disappeared.⁶ Chain Canyon was the gateway to the inaccessible basin, one mile above Barry's Landing. Garvin and Lee had an ideal location for their operations. The Big Horns offered protection on the east, the canyon offered partial protection on the west, and the Trout Creek Canyon offered protection to the south. To complete their isolation they fastened two fifteen foot long chains across the opening of the canyon from the west. Hence, the canyon and the river crossing received the name "Chain."

But a Frank Heinrich (later to become most important stockman in Montana) was suspicious of Garvin and Lee; and notified law officials, who descended on Garvin and Lee in February, 1901. Garvin and Lee admitted the brands had been changed on the cattle they had in their possession, but they swore it was done by the men from whom they purchased the cattle.⁷ When the Grand Jury met in Billings, Garvin and Lee attempted to intimidate witnesses with bribes to leave the state or withhold testimony. But they were indicted and later convicted, receiving one-year prison terms and one-thousand dollar fines. The prosecution claimed that the sentences were too light to act as a deterrent against future rustling.⁸

The major controversy in the Dryhead country today is the proposed Transpark Highway. Tentatively approved, the two-line paved road would run parallel to the Big Horn River from Devil's Canyon Overlook to the vicinity of the ruins of Fort C. F. Smith, located just north of the Yellowtail Dam. From the north, the new road would connect with the road that leads to Hardin. From the south, it would connect with the road that leads to Lovell. The present route is an adequate, but in spots rough-going and wet, dirt and gravel road. But would this new road serve its original purpose of making access easier to the National Recreation Area? Or is the Park Service bowing to commercial interests in Lovell and Hardin? For the first time, commercial and everyday traffic would be able to travel, with minimal inconvenience, from Yellowstone valley to the eastern portion of the Big Horn Basin, without having to go west of the Big Horns or east of the Pryors.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Since this report was a general survey, superficial in some aspects, more research is needed into the human habitation of the Pryors. Future investigations could possibly narrow in on a specific topic, in such areas where more information is sorely needed, like on the Bowler Flats, Piney Creek - Southwest Pryors, Gyp Flats, or the Dryhead. Investigations should get as many interviews on tape as possible to preserve what "old-timers" know about the history of the Pryors.

Since the Pryor Mountains are off the "beaten track," away from the main traveled roads, and not as scenic as such ranges as the Beartooths, they have in the past not attracted many tourists. But since the establishment of the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area and the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range, the Pryors have begun to attract more visitors. A plea for further historical investigations is justified, if the "living history" of the Pryors is to be available to these visitors. Investigations should be aimed at not only determining what sites are deemed necessary for preservation and stabilization, but attempt to preserve the environment surrounding these sites in its natural state. The overall scenic quality of the Pryors is just as historically important as the individual sites.

More signs will be needed in the Pryors to indicate to the visitor the location of these sites. I am for minimal development of the Pryors. I do not want to compromise its unique personality of serenity by criss-crossing it with more roads, or even improve present roads. But if we are going to have roads and trails to certain places in the Pryors, there might as well be signs showing where these places are located. For example, a sign indicating the turn for the Sage Creek Ranger Station should be erected. A sign showing the way to the northern entrance to the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range should be erected. Once the procedure of putting up signs is completed, then the need for historical markers at specific sites or areas becomes extremely necessary along with the restoration or stabilization and protection of certain sites.

I do not mean we should have historical markers of the billboard variety. A small marker denoting and explaining the historical significance of a site or area is all that is needed. To preserve the natural tranquility and environment of many areas where sites are located, motor vehicle traffic should be prohibited. The construction of hiking trails to some of these sites might be a feasible alternative.

So that possibly some meaningful guidelines can be drawn from my report, I make the following recommendations to those that are chiefly responsible for the welfare of the Pryor Mountains:

1. Bureau of Land Management

I think more signs within the Pryors are needed to direct one's way to and through the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range. Historical markers could be strategically placed on the range explaining the events that led to the founding of the horse range. This does not mean roads leading to or

within the horse range have to be improved. Contact with the horses by the public should be minimal. The "wildness" of the horses should not be compromised, and the welfare of the horses should come before the welfare of the visitor.

The BLM should do more investigation into the old horse traps within the horse range. Small historical markers could eventually be placed at the old horse traps. The Gyp Kiln, the Bowler Lime Kiln, and the Cummings' cabin on East Pryor should also be subjected to further historical investigation, with historical markers placed at each.

2. United States Forest Service

The following should be the subject of further historical investigation and possibly cited by historical markers: 1. the rock dam on Sage Creek, 2. the Sage Creek Ranger Station, which was used by early horseback rangers for their meetings, 3. Hugh Kelsey's cabin, 4. the Strong cabin, 5. the site of the Harvey Ray sawmill, 6. the site of the Schow brothers sawmill, and 7. "Tie Flats." Since most of the scenic areas in the Pryors are on national forest lands, then the possibility of leaving much of it in its natural state, in order not to disturb the mountains' "unique personality" and "living history," should be seriously considered.

3. Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area

The following should be the subject of further historical investigation and possibly cited with historical markers: 1. the "M-L" ranch, 2. Hillsboro, which I understand the Park Service is planning to restore, 3. Hough Creek Ranger Station - the old Ewing-Snell homestead, and 4. the "Bad Pass" Trail. The Park Service should preserve the rock cairns and other historical sites along the "Bad Pass" route that could be damaged or aesthetically compromised by the Transpark Road.

4. Crow Indian Reservation

The following should be the subject of further historical investigation and possibly cited with historical markers: 1. Pryor Gap, 2. Arrow Rock and the "Little People," 3. railroad line through the reservation, 4. railroad cemetery, 5. Crockett water tower foundations, 6. cheese factory, 7. Indian Springs cabin, 8. location of famous Crow Indian battle against their hostile Indian neighbors on Pryor Creek, 9. "Teton Jack" Cave, 10. "Battleground" Bend, and 11. Bozeman Trail location.

5. Sites on Private Land

The designation of sites and areas on private land that merit further historical investigation and marking should be carried out either by the private owners themselves, the previously mentioned agencies, or by local or state historical societies. I recommend action on the following: 1. the Shriver ranch and Post Office, 2. the Cummings ranch and Post Office, 3. the Schwend ranch, 4. the Stevens sawmill on the Poole place, 5. Bowler store, 6. the exact locations of the first and second Bowler,

7. Bowler cemetery, 8. Bridger Trail, 9. Bozeman Trail, 10. Raymond Post Office (on the Marchant ranch), 11. location of the Coyote Springs stage stop, 12. exact stagecoach routes, 13. Kreuger's cabins, 14. Post Offices, settlements and ranches in the Dryhead, and 15. the "Bad Pass" route. '

Historical investigations are necessary if we are to understand who we were and what we are today by reminding us of our heritage. The preservation and restoration of the many historical sites and areas in the Pryor Mountains will give us a "living history," enabling us to comprehend this heritage.

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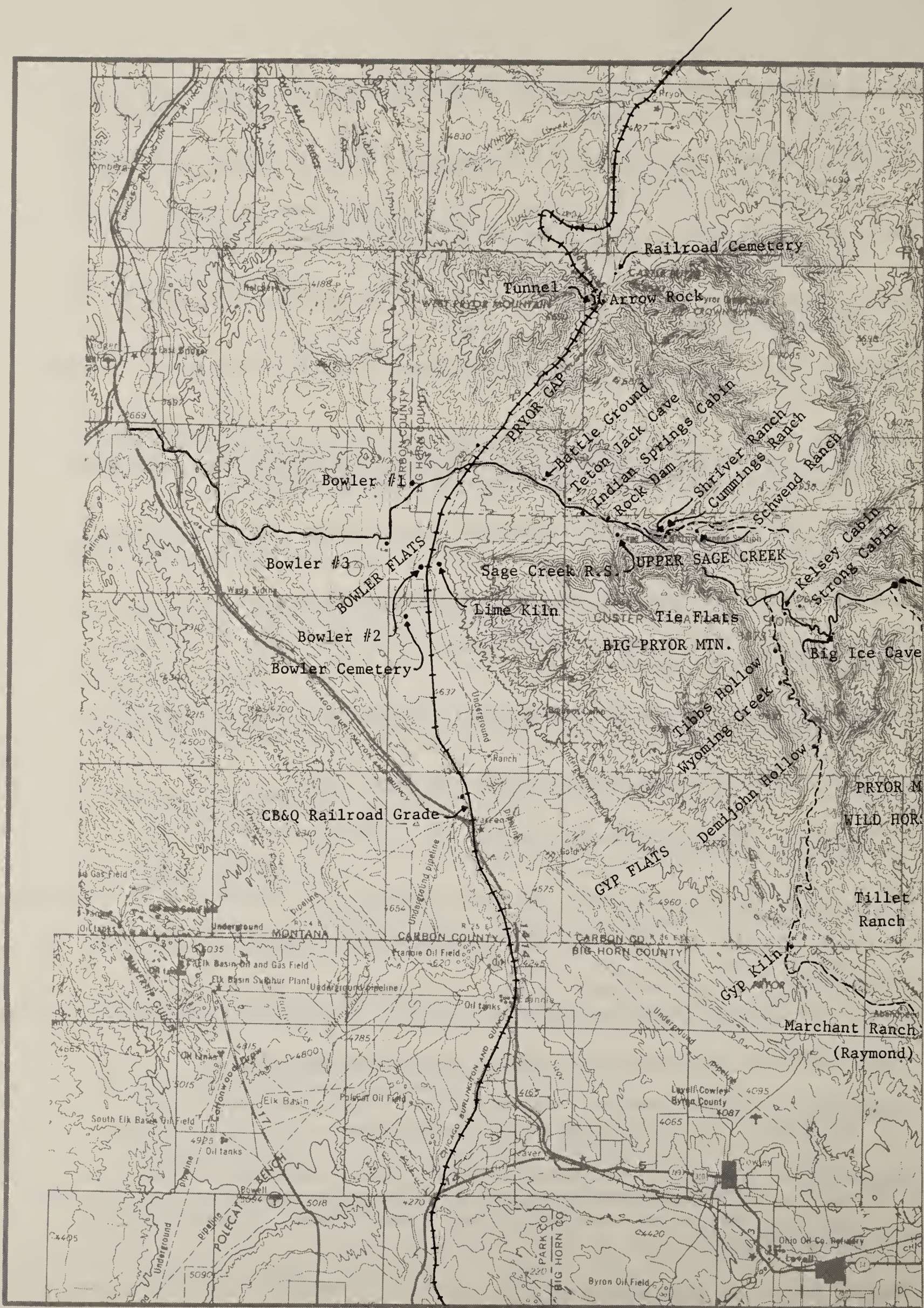
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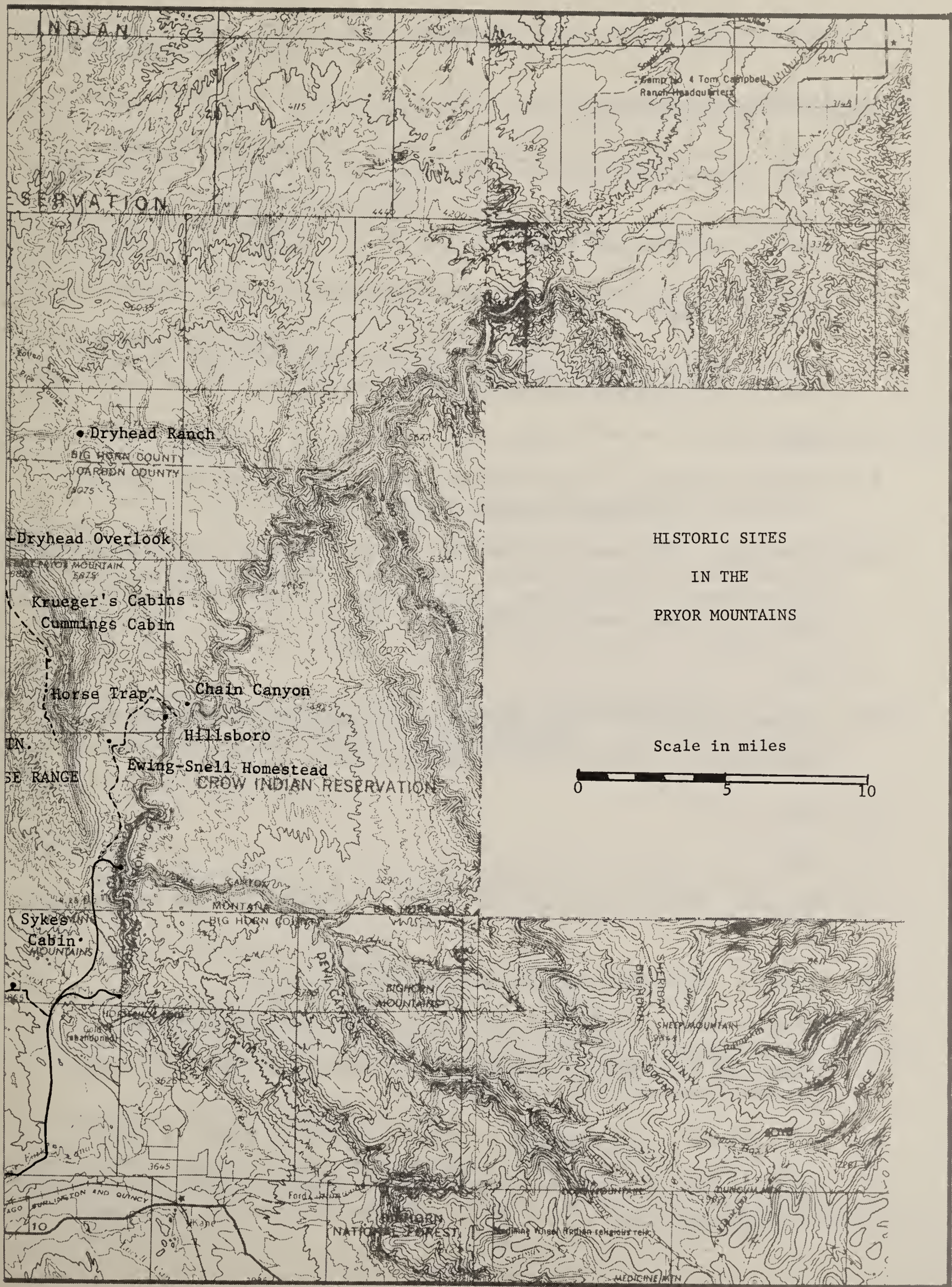
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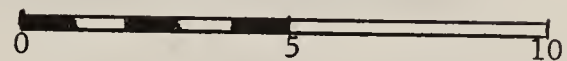
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IN THE
PRYOR MOUNTAINS

Scale in miles



Footnotes

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Appendix A - Personal Interviews

(All in Montana unless otherwise noted)

George Osten, Billings
Harold Hagen, Billings
Jim Wempner, Billings
Elma Snell, Billings
J. R. Ralston, Billings
Stuart Conner, Billings
Beverly St. John, Billings
Art Graham, Bridger
Hank Bratsky, Bridger
Art Foust, Bridger
Charles "Tuffy" Abbott, Bridger
Mabry McDowell, Bridger
Mr. and Mrs. Bill Moody, Bridger
Roger and Pat Marchant, Crooked Creek, Wyoming
Bessie Tillett, Crooked Creek, Wyoming
Royce Tillett, Crooked Creek, Wyoming
Lloyd Tillett, Crooked Creek, Wyoming
Peter Tuggle, Pryor
Homer Wilhelm, Pryor
Bill and Nancy Poole, Sage Creek
Bert Schwend, Sage Creek
Heman Smith, Lovell, Wyoming
Francis Burrell, Lovell, Wyoming
Hiram Bischoff, Lovell, Wyoming
Dick Godfrey, Cowley, Wyoming
Jesse Godfrey, Cowley, Wyoming
Jim Donley, Cowley, Wyoming
Frank Clift, Columbus
Myron Lynde, Lodge Grass
Mr. and Mrs. Frank McClintock, Rockvale
Paul Weaver, Frannie, Wyoming

Phone Interviews

Harriet Clemens, Wellington, Colorado
Myrtle Bailey, Billings
Herman Kreuger, Cody, Wyoming

Appendix B - Legal Locations of Sites

1. Bureau of Land Management Land

- a. Cummings' Cabin - NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 17, T. 8 S., R. 28 E.
- b. Lime Kiln - SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 29, T. 7 S., R. 25 E.
- c. Gyp Kiln - Sec. 4, T. 10 S., R. 27 E.
- d. Mystery Cave Road Horse Trap - NW $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 28, T. 8 S., R. 28 E.

2. Crow Indian Reservation Land

- a. Arrow Rock - NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 7, T. 6 S., R. 26 E.
- b. Railroad Tunnel - NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 7, T. 6 S., R. 26 E.
- c. Crockett Water Tower Foundations - NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 9, T. 7 S., R. 25 E.
- d. Railroad Cemetery - SE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 6, T. 6 S., R. 26 E.

3. National Park Service Land

- a. Hillsboro - NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 36, T. 8 S., R. 28 E.
- b. Hough Creek Ranger Station - SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 2, T. 9 S., R. 28 E.

4. Private Land

- a. Kreuger's Cabins - SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 8, T. 8 S., R. 28 E.
- b. Bowler Cemetery - SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 7, T. 8 S., R. 25 E.
- c. Bowler Store - NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 25, T. 7 S., R. 24 E.
- d. Dryhead Ranch - NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 9, T. 7 S., R. 28 E.
- e. Raymond Post Office (Marchant Ranch) - SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 33, T. 58 N., R. 95 W.
- f. Sykes' Cabin - N $\frac{1}{2}$, Sec. 26, T. 58 N., R. 95 W.

This intern report was read and accepted by a staff member at:

Agency: Bureau of Land Management

Address: P.O. Box 2020
Billings, Montana 59103

This report was completed by a WICHE intern. This intern's project was part of the Resources Development Internship Program administered by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE).

The purpose of the internship program is to bring organizations involved in community and economic development, environmental problems and the humanities together with institutions of higher education and their students in the West for the benefit of all.

For these organizations, the intern program provides the problem-solving talents of student manpower while making the resources of universities and colleges more available. For institutions of higher education, the program provides relevant field education for their students while building their capacity for problem-solving.

WICHE is an organization in the West uniquely suited for sponsoring such a program. It is an interstate agency formed by the thirteen western states for the specific purpose of relating the resources of higher education to the needs of western citizens. WICHE has been concerned with a broad range of community needs in the West for some time, insofar as they bear directly on the well-being of western peoples and the future of higher education in the West. WICHE feels that the internship program is one method for meeting its obligations within the thirteen western states. In its efforts to achieve these objectives, WICHE appreciates having received the generous support and assistance of the Economic Development Administration; the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation; the National Endowment for the Humanities; the National Science Foundation; the Division of Education of HEW; and of innumerable local leaders and community organizations, including the agency that sponsored this intern project.

For further information, write Bob Hullinghorst, Director, Resources Development Internship Program, WICHE, Drawer 'P', Boulder, Colorado 80302, (303) 443-6144.

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